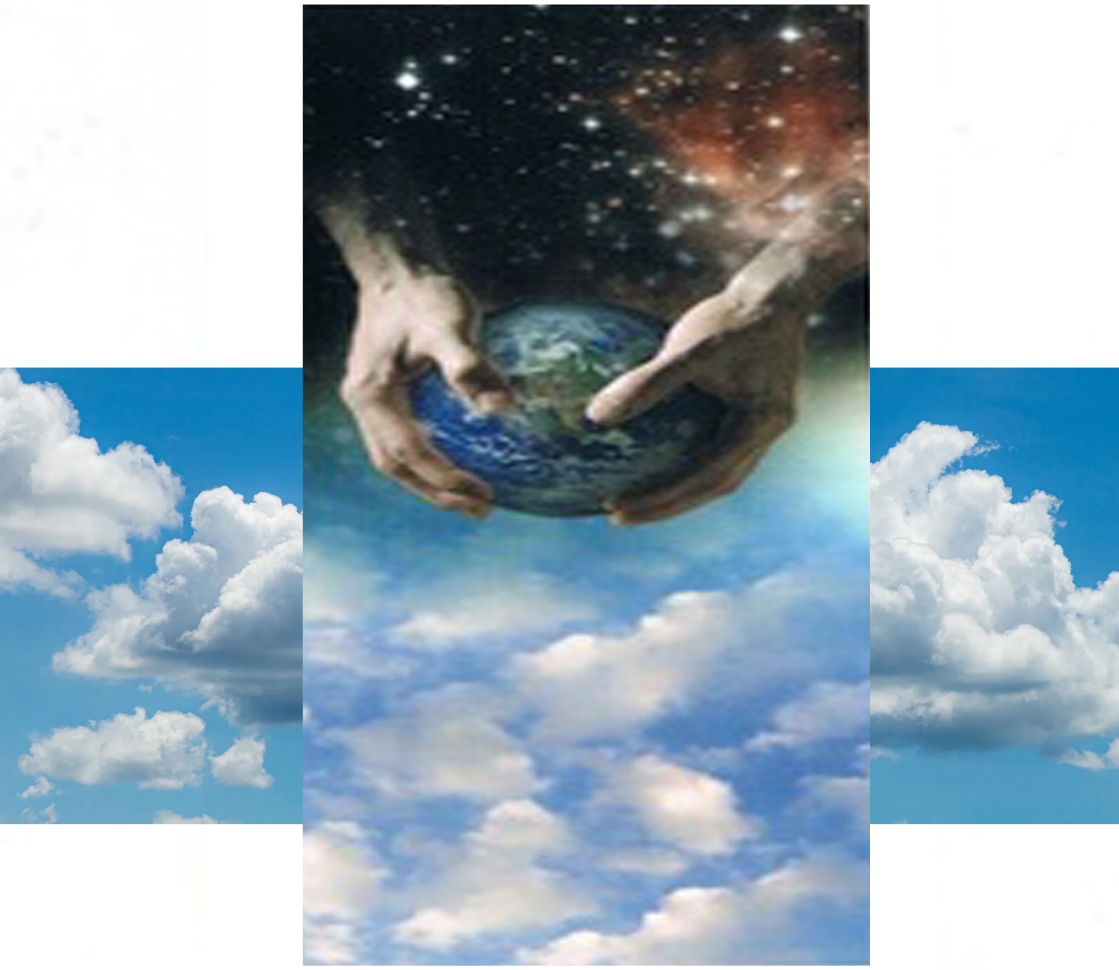
A Revelation of the Revelation

A verse-by verse commentary on the Book of Revelation



By Nicholas Brightman

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A COMMENTARY ON THE
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Preface

The title of this book honours a namesake, Thomas Brightman (1562-1607) whose influential work *A Revelation of the Revelation*, a title considered by his contemporaries to be 'impertinent', was published in London in 1611, the same year as the King James Bible (KJV).

Reverend Brightman, a fellow of Queen's College, Cambridge, until his appointment as rector of Haynes (then Hawnes), Bedfordshire in 1592 presented an interpretation of the book of Revelation based on the historicist approach. That is, he saw the book of Revelation as presenting a chronological outline of church history covering the entire Christian era. He was not alone in this thinking and was in the company of such reputable scholars as Sir Isaac Newton[1] along with most of the Reformers. In contrast, most critical scholars today see Revelation as referring solely to local events either during the time of the apostles or at the extreme end of time.

A correct method of interpreting Revelation is crucial to gaining a meaningful understanding of the book. In Chapter 2 of this book I shall explore the various methods of interpretation that have been applied in the past and present. I will attempt to show how Thomas Brightman's historicist approach, while reaching conclusions that appear implausible in the 21st century – he applied the seven churches to the nations of Europe[2] - were based on a sound methodology.

It is fair to state from the outset that this book, being in the form of a commentary, may not be best read from cover to cover; the reader may gain more in using it to seek a perspective on a Biblical passage being studied.

Nicholas C. Brightman

July 2026

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[1] Sir Isaac Newton, *Observations Upon the Prophecies of Daniel, and the Apocalypse of St. John* (London:1773).

[2] See tract Reverend Mr. Brightman's Judgement...Royal Exchange, Cornhill, 1697, published anonymously 90 years after his death, now in the British Library.

Acknowledgements

This book is intended for the lay reader. I have used a variety of commentaries of differing theological perspectives, and made use of various internet articles. Where they have been quoted credit has been given.

Particular credit is given to the writings and tapes of Drs. Jon Paulien and Richard Davidson, professors of theology at Loma Linda University and Andrews University respectively, whose lectures and presentations have been most influential in my understanding of the Book of Revelation.

Special thanks go to Penny Eldridge who has done the historical research on Thomas Brightman.

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Introduction

It is popularly believed, and taught by many churchmen, that the book of Revelation cannot be understood. This book is an attempt to understand it. It is probable that any reluctance to try and fathom the book of Revelation comes from the ease with which wild and fanciful interpretations may be placed upon it. Such a book, with its dramatic symbolism, lends itself to interpretations that the cautious will no doubt shun. This is reasonable. However, by applying some basic principles, it is possible to paint the picture portrayed in the book without being carried away with inappropriate explanations.

Having said that, parts of this book are still not easy to understand, and there are many symbols that may be understood in more than one light depending upon the reader's approach to prophecy. For example the locusts described in Chapter 9 are difficult to give an exact meaning, and some commentaries, such as the NIV Study Bible make no attempt at an interpretation while John Wesley, for example, understood them to represent the Arabians[3]. Other passages raise questions about whether they should be understood symbolically or literally; this is particularly true of the group of 144,000 mentioned in Chapters 7 and 14.

In seeking to understand this book a degree of humility is required; our attempts at interpretation should be accompanied with sensitivity because it is probable that we shall all be taken by surprise on the day that everything in the book is revealed. Perhaps Christ's words to the disciples concerning the things that are to come best explain the reason God gave us this book – so that when the events described take place, then we might believe (John 13:19, 14:29).

All Scripture References, except where indicated, are from the World English Bible (WEB). I have placed each verse on a new line to make it easier to find a specific verse.

[3] Explanatory Notes on the Whole Bible by John Wesley [1754-65] published in www.Bible Hub.

Chapter 1

1-1 The Time is At Hand

Rev 1:1-3

> *This is the Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things which must happen soon, which he sent and made known by his angel to his servant, John,*
> *2 who testified to God's word, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, about everything that he saw.*
> *3 Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things that are written in it, for the time is at hand.*

The Revelation of Jesus Christ.
This is the Revelation of Jesus, not of John; John is simply the scribe. John does not identify himself as the Gospel writer, and it cannot be definitively stated that he is. There are some differences in the use of Greek grammar which suggest to some modern scholars that somebody other than the apostle was the author. On the other hand there are similarities in the choice of words and expressions that are common to John's Gospel and *Revelation.* For example, it is only in these two books that Christ is referred to as the Lamb (John 1:29, 36; Rev 5:6, plus 28 others), only in these two books are there references to "living water" (John 4:10, 7:38) and the "water of life" (Rev 21:6, 22:17).

If not John the Apostle, the author must have been well known to the Christian community as he did not deem it necessary to give more than his first name. Furthermore, John in his Gospel identifies himself frequently as "that other disciple" (18:16, 20:2-8) as though he doesn't place great importance to who the author was. One can imagine John saying, "this is not about me, it's about Jesus".

Blessed is he who reads…

This is the first of seven beatitudes in Revelation.[4] The beatitudes are the first mentioned of several 'sevens'. The number is commonly related to the things of God, the first mentioned in Scripture being the reference to God's resting on the seventh day of His Creation. Thus the number seven suggests completion or perfection.

We will continually run into the number seven in the book of Revelation. Some other references will be seen as follows:

1:4	seven churches, seven spirits
1:12	seven golden lampstands
1:16	seven stars
4:5	seven lamps of fire
5:1	seven seals
8:2	seven angels
8:6	seven trumpets
10:4	seven thunders
15:1	seven angels with seven plagues
16:1	seven bowls
17:3	seven heads

There are other 'sevens' to be found, some of which do not present themselves so readily. We shall see, for example, that the entire book is divided into seven sections. Later in the book we shall see sin given a seven thousand year life-span - that is 6000 years of man's sinful existence plus a one-thousand year period of sabbath rest for the earth.

The Time is At Hand.
What did Jesus mean by this expression? When it is used in its Biblical context it usually refers to the time of Judgment and the Second Advent of Christ. A clue is found in Mark 13:28-30, *Now from the fig tree, learn this parable. When the branch has now become tender, and produces its leaves, you know that the summer is near; even so you also, when you see these things coming to pass, know that it is near, at the doors. Most certainly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things happen.*

In this dialogue Jesus was opening future events to His disciples that were to take place not only in their lifetimes, but also at the end of the world. Thus the time to which Jesus referred was not then near, but

[4] The other six are: 14:13, 16:15, 19:9, 20:6, 22:7 and 22:14.

that when the time *was* near they would recognise it. Jesus spoke these words in AD31, and John wrote much later, possibly around AD68 during Nero's persecution. If this is the case, it is probable that the event that was near at the time John wrote was the Fall of Jerusalem in AD70. If so, Christians of this era would have expected Christ to return during their lifetime, and may have seen the current persecution as a precursor to His coming.

This may not seem of major significance, but it is important because it gives us a clue how to understand the book of Revelation. This book was written by a Jew. John was a man who came out of a Jewish culture and who was raised on the Hebrew Scriptures. Therefore when we try to understand this book, we must ask ourselves what John had in mind as he wrote what he saw. This will help keep us out of trouble when we get to some of the more difficult passages. So let us apply a few principles that will serve as guidelines in understanding the mysterious book of Revelation.

Scripture Interprets Scripture
In all study of the Scriptures the reader will frequently find that a passage is explained by another passage. This is particularly so of the books of Daniel and the Revelation, the apocalyptic books. Thus we find in Revelation 1:20 that stars represent angels and the candlesticks represent churches. We shall also see that such symbols as horns, heads, crowns, sea, land etc. will similarly be interpreted for us.

The Hebrew Scriptures
Much of the book of Revelation alludes to, or echoes, the Old Testament. Therefore in interpreting any passage we must ask ourselves what Old Testament passage John had in mind when he wrote these words. There are four major events recorded in the Old Testament, and much of Revelation can be seen to allude to those four events. They are the Creation, the Flood, the Exodus, and the Exile. Interestingly these four events follow a pattern. The Flood is actually an undoing of the Creation. Creation separates the waters; the Flood brings them back together. The pattern is followed in the Exodus where again the waters of the Red Sea are separated, dry land appears, and a nation comes forth. God's enemies are destroyed when the waters come back together again. Finally in the Exile, that nation is symbolically swallowed up as ten of the twelve tribes of Israel cease to exist.

As we study the book of Revelation, especially the trumpets and the plagues, we shall again see the Creation being undone prior to God's act of establishing a new heaven and a new earth.

The Temple Theme
There is an additional theme that runs through the book of Revelation which is also seen throughout the Old Testament, and that is the temple theme. Much of the Old Testament refers to the earthly sanctuary and to its services; similarly the book of Revelation revolves around events in the heavenly sanctuary. In fact all references to heaven in the book are actually references to the heavenly temple. In the book of Revelation heaven is the Temple.

It was mentioned that the book is divided into seven sections. In fact it is in the references to the heavenly sanctuary, or temple, that these divisions are created. Each section begins with a sanctuary scene, a scene in heaven, which acts as a backdrop for the next series of images that John sees. These scenes are found as follows:

Scene 1. 1:12	Followed by: The seven Churches.
Scene 2. 4:1	Followed by: The seven Seals
Scene 3. 8:1	Followed by: The seven Trumpets.
Scene 4. 11:19	Followed by: The Good vs. Evil theme
Scene 5. 15:5	Followed by: The seven Plagues.
Scene 6. 19:11	Followed by: The Judgment.
Scene 7. 21:1	Followed by: The New Earth.

In each of these scenes John *looks* into heaven. There are several other times when he *hears* a voice or a sound in heaven, but these do not appear to act as any kind of division between scenes.

The Structure of Revelation
This rather basic outline in many ways fails to do justice to the Book of Revelation, for its structure is more complex than this. For example, while each scene commences with an introductory view into the temple, each is also then followed by a description of an event in heaven or on earth. Each section also concludes with an eschatological, or end time, climax that shows the deliverance of the saved or the destruction of the unsaved.

Chiastic Structures

Woven into this is what is termed a 'chiastic' structure. The word is derived from the Greek letter Χ - chi, and refers to the technique used by Bible writers to present a thought or idea, or series of thoughts, and then present them again in a mirror image order as follows:

Idea A
Idea B
Idea C
Idea D
Idea C^1
Idea B^1
Idea A^1

For example, Chapter 1 contains a blessing by the Alpha and Omega upon those who obey God's word. Following this introduction we explore John's visions in a historical context through to the end of Chapter 11. Then the central portion of the Book, Chapters 12-14 give a brief outline of the conflict between Good and Evil from the birth of Christ to the Second Advent. Then from Chapter 15-20 we again explore John's visions, this time in an eschatological, or end time, judgment context. Finally the epilogue brings us to the blessing of the Alpha and Omega upon those who obey God's Word. This may be outlines as follows:

A. Prologue 1:1-8: Beatitude, Second Coming, Alpha & Omega.
B. God's People 2:1 – 3:22: The Seven Churches
C. 6:1 – 8:1 The Seven Seals
D. 8:2 – 11:19: The Seven Trumpets
E. 12:1-17: First Advent of Christ
F. 13:1-18: Call to worship the beast
G. 14:6, 7. Call to worship the Creator
F^1. 14:8-11: Results of worshipping the beast
E^1. 14:14-20: Second Advent of Christ
D^1. 15-17: The Seven Plagues
C^1. 20:1-15: The Millennium
B^1. God's People 21:1 – 22:5: The New Jerusalem
A^1 Epilogue 22:6-21: Alpha & Omega, Beatitude, Second Coming.

When we study Chapter 14 we will take a closer look at the apical portion of the chiasm, the point at which the climax is reached and the

mirror imaging commences. The literary structure of Revelation is in fact quite complex, and takes us beyond the scope of this book.[5]

By now the mysteries of this book that 'cannot be understood' are becoming clearer. It is my wish that we all will come to understand and love this book, because as we enter into the dark and troubled time predicted in the book of Revelation it is our knowledge of the Scriptures, and especially of prophecy, that will provide the anchor we shall need to remain true to God. For it is well written, "None but those whose minds are fortified with the truths of Scripture will stand in the last conflict".[6]

1-2 The Seven Churches

Rev 1:4-6

> *John, to the seven assemblies that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from God, who is and who was and who is to come; and from the seven Spirits who are before his throne;*
> *5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us, and washed us from our sins by his blood;*
> *6 and he made us to be a kingdom, priests to his God and Father; to him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

The Seven Churches

John reveals that seven churches in Asia, or modern-day Turkey, are the recipients of this book. Verse 11 identifies the seven churches, in clockwise order, starting with Ephesus at '9 o'clock'. This order probably signifies the movement of a messenger from Patmos, the island where John was held captive, as he delivers letters to the churches.

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[5] Interested readers may wish to refer to the following work: Symposium on Revelation Vol 1, Editor Frank B. Holbrook, Biblical Research Institute, Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, 1992. Articles by Kenneth A. Strand.

[6] White, E.G. *The Great* Controversy, Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1950. p.594

This immediately raises the question, why would such an important message be given only to a few small churches in Turkey? Surely God would have intended this for all Christians, especially those in the major centres of Christianity such as Rome, Alexandria, and Antioch. There were other churches in Asia at Colossae and Hierapolis (see Colossians 1:2 and 4:13), but these are not included.

The answer to this question lies in the symbolic nature of this book. The book of Revelation is a book of symbols. While some passages are clearly symbolic, there are others, such as the seven churches themselves, and the 144,000 redeemed of Chapter 7, that tempt readers to apply literal interpretations. Even though there may be times when a literal interpretation is possible, it will be found by and large that a more consistent understanding is reached if caution is used when applying a literal interpretation to any particular passage.

Therefore, the seven churches may be better seen as a symbolic representation of Christendom. The names of the churches and the characteristics of the cities in which they are found give clues as to the identity of the symbols. This will be looked at when we study the individual churches.

The Nature of God

Revelation 1:4-6 demonstrates the unity of the Godhead. John writes on behalf of the One 'who is and was and is to come', the seven Spirits, and Jesus Christ. In verse 4 the One 'who is and was and is to come' clearly refers to God the Father, and the seven Spirits suggest the perfection of the Holy Spirit. Isaiah 11:2 says the same thing in a different way: *And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD* (KJV).

However, not only is the book from the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, but we see that the description of the Father also applies to the Son. For while verse 4 identifies the Father as the One 'who is, and was, and is to come', verses 8-18 clearly identify Christ as the One who 'is and was and is to come'.

Hence we see in the book of Revelation that there is a unity between the Father and Son that is perhaps best explained by the words of Christ Himself, *"I and my Father are One"* (John 10:30). How true are

the Apostle Paul's words in Colossians 2:9 that *in Him* [Christ] *all the fullness of the Deity dwells bodily.*

When we study Chapter 13 we shall discover the presence of a counterfeit trinity formed on earth by Satan who seeks to establish his own eternal kingdom based on a diabolical corruption of the True.

Kings and Priests
Verse 6 tells us that we, the readers of the book of Revelation, are to be kings and priests in the service of God. What does this mean? In *1-1 The Time is Near* we observed that much of the book of Revelation alludes to, or echoes, the Old Testament. Here is a good example. For in Exodus 19:6 we find the following instruction given by God to Moses: *You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.*

Therefore our passage may be better understood to mean that God sees His followers as a kingdom of priests. But what is the role of a priest? There were three in Israel who were anointed to their calling; prophets, priests and kings. The prophet's role was to represent God to the people; he (or in a few cases, she) was God's representative to the people. The priest, conversely, was anointed to come before God on behalf of the people – to plead for them, or to intercede for them; the priest was the people's spokesman before God.

The king was anointed to lead the people in affairs of state. However, it had not been God's original intention for Israel to have a king. God Himself was to have been their King, ruling the land, and through their faithful witness, ruling the world, under a loving theocracy.

But now God says we are all priests who serve under Jesus Christ, the True Prophet, the heavenly High Priest, the King of kings, our Creator and Redeemer. We are, as Peter says, a holy priesthood, a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:5, 9). Our role is one of service to mankind, and one of intercession for others, not only to pray for them, but to lead them to the great High Priest who atones for them in the heavenly sanctuary.

1-3 The Coming King

Rev 1:7-8

Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, including those who pierced him. All the tribes of the earth will mourn over him. Even so, Amen.
8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

The Coming King
As soon as the introductions are out of the way, John gets straight to the main theme of this book, the return of Jesus Christ in all His glory; He will come in the clouds and His Coming will be visible to the whole world.

This thought is difficult for many to comprehend; the idea of Christ coming back in person seems out of sync with life as we understand it. Some have suggested that the Second Coming of Christ is a spiritual event seen, not with the physical eye, but with the heart. Thus as the sinner accepts his or her Saviour, the 'second coming' has occurred. There are problems with this suggestion though, for the event is seen not just by the righteous, but by the wicked. Indeed, even those who pierced Him will see it.

The passage echoes the words of Christ Himself in Matthew 24:30 when He spoke about the end of the world: *and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky. Then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. A*t Christ's ascension, as He was taken up to heaven in a cloud, two angels remained behind with a message for the confused disciples,*"You men of Galilee",* they said*, "Why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who was received up from you into the sky, will come back in the same way as you saw him going into the sky* (Acts 1:11)*."*

The prophet Daniel also saw a similar event in conjunction with a great judgment scene in heaven. As the heavenly court room was set up for the judgment of the great beast and its horn that made war with the saints, he records in Daniel 7:13, *In my vision at night I looked and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence* (NIV)[7]*.*

[7] *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 2010.

Those who Pierced Him

As we have noted, the event of Christ's return is seen, not only by the righteous, but also the living unsaved as well. But what does John mean by saying that those who were responsible for nailing Jesus to the cross would see Him return? No doubt John, who was present at Christ's trial had heard Him warn Caiaphas the High Priest that *"…after this you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of the sky."* (Matthew 26:64). Therefore, it is possible that there will be a resurrection of certain of the unfaithful, including those who were actively involved in the death of Jesus. Alternatively, the unsaved will no doubt have revealed to them, at their judgment, by means we can only guess at today, the truth of their actions that led to their loss of heaven so that they may fully understand the final end of their opposition to Truth.

Some may assume that the Scriptures teach that all the dead, both saved and unsaved, will be raised at the Second Advent, and thus this passage presents no difficulty. However, when we study Revelation 20 we shall see that there are in fact two resurrections with a considerable time period between them. The first resurrection is for those who have died in Christ, and the second is for those who have not. Thus the fact that Caiaphas will see Christ return implies either his special resurrection at the day of the Lord, or at his resurrection at the end of the thousand years. Undoubtedly, the unsaved, when raised to face their judgment, will be presented with the evidence for their guilty verdict.

This passage also makes allusion to Zechariah 12:10. *And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son* (NIV).

Tribes of the Earth

John's reference to 'tribes or peoples of the earth' is worthy of note. It crops up time and time again in the book of Revelation in one form or another, and always refers to the unsaved. For example in Revelation 6:10 we read: *"…How long, Master, the holy and true, until you judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"* Likewise in Revelation 8:13, we also find the expression, '*Woe to the inhabitants of the earth…*' The righteous, on the other hand, are always seen in relationship to heaven. For example, the two faithful groups of Chapter 7 are seen as citizens of heaven, not of the earth.

When Jesus was on earth one aspect of His mission was to establish the kingdom of heaven. Thus as He drew 'all men to Himself' (John 12:32), they became at that time citizens of His kingdom. This helps us understand why He conducted His ministry as He did; He cast out demons because demons have no place in His kingdom; He healed the sick because in His kingdom there is no sickness; He raised the dead because in His kingdom there is no death.

Thus the book of Revelation paints a picture of two societies, one forgiven, righteous, and even if still physically on earth, citizens of heaven; the other unforgiven, unrepentant citizens of earth. Heaven is seen as the home of the forgiven while the earth is the home of the unsaved.

The Alpha and Omega

These, of course, refer to the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, and refer to God's all-inclusiveness in the way we sometimes refer to the 'A to Z' of a matter. There is a quiet echo here of Isaiah 46:10, *"for I am God, and there is no other. I am God, and there is none like me. I declare the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done."*

Again we see the close relationship between Father and Son in the Godhead. In verses 8 and 11 of Isaiah 45: the Lord describes Himself as the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, the Almighty. This sounds as though the Father is speaking, yet Revelation 22:13 identifies the Alpha and Omega as Christ.

The nature of the Godhead is a mystery to man, one that he has never been able to explain. Perhaps one way God has helped us grasp this unfathomable relationship is through His joining of Adam and Eve together in marriage, observing that they were now one flesh; two separate individuals, yet one in spirit, purpose, and flesh[8].

Christianity is seen by other faiths as blasphemous because of its understanding of a Triune God. Yet Jesus Himself was considered

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[8] Genesis 2:24 says that Adam and Eve became 'one flesh'. There are two Hebrew words for 'one'. One is *Yachid*, meaning unique, or one of a kind. The other, *Echad,* means 'one' in the sense of unity, for example, 'the team played as one man', or 'we are one in the spirit'. The word 'one' in Genesis 2:24 is *Echad*. Similarly, in the *Shema* (Deuteronomy 6:4) *Echad* is also used: *Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one* (Echad) *LORD.*

blasphemous when He proclaimed before a hostile crowd, *"Most certainly, I tell you, before Abraham came into existence, I AM."* (John 8:58).

1-4 In the Spirit

Rev 1:9-11

> *I John, your brother and partaker with you in oppression and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the isle that is called Patmos because of God's Word and the testimony of Jesus Christ.*
> *10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet*
> *11 saying, "What you see, write in a book and send to the seven assemblies: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and to Laodicea."*

Patmos
Patmos was a small rocky island, used as a penal colony, just off the Turkish coast not far from Ephesus. The fact that John was there "because of the word of God" leaves us in little doubt as to the reason for his being there. It seems that even the peaceable John, who wrote so much about love, could not escape offending the Roman authorities in living out his faith. While no Christian should be offensive in his faith, none should fail to stand up fearlessly for it when pressed to do so.

The Lord's Day
How shall we understand this expression? There are several possibilities:

1. It is another way of saying, "The Day of the Lord". This would mean that John was shown a vision concerning the end times. This is logical given that the book of Revelation is about just that, but it runs into a difficulty with the Greek expression used here. The Greek is, *kuriakē hēmera,* and is used only this one time. The expression, 'Day of the Lord', when used in the New Testament, is always translated, *hēmera tou kuriou* or *hēmera kuriou.*

However, most of these latter references are the work of the Apostle Paul whose Greek was flawless. John, as we have noted, was not so well versed in Greek, and may have written the expression differently.

2. It was an anniversary of a day highly significant in the life of our Lord such as His death or resurrection, but there is no Scriptural evidence for this.

3. The 'Lord' referred to Caesar, and that this was a special day in his honour in the way that we might refer to 'The Queen's Birthday'. There is written evidence from this period that Caesar was referred to as *kurios* – lord, but according to the contemporary Jewish historian Josephus, Jews refused to acknowledge Caesar with this title. It seems highly unlikely that John, who was a victim of Caesar's anti-Christian policies, would use such a title.

4. It was Sunday. This is the popularly accepted view, and evidence for it is presented in the fact that the Church Fathers used it in reference to Sunday. The earliest reference to the expression comes from a late 2nd century document known as *The Gospel According to Peter*, which links it with the day of Christ's Resurrection. However, in that this non-canonical document was written nearly 100 years after John's time, it cannot be used as proof that John had the same idea in mind.

There is no Biblical evidence for linking the expression with Sunday; it is based more on tradition than exegesis. Popular commentaries such as the one that accompanies the NIV Study Bible offer two Scriptural references for the expression referring to Sunday. They are:

Acts 20:7, *On the first day of the week, when the disciples were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and continued his speech until midnight*.

and

1 Corinthians 16:2, *On the first day of every week, let each one of you save, as he may prosper, that no collections are made when I come*. These, it will be noticed, only discuss events that took place on the first day of the week, and are therefore probably not the most useful texts to present the case for Sunday as a new Sabbath. Paul would have preached on any day of the week, and travelled long distances on any day of the week except the Sabbath day.

5. It was the Sabbath. This option has far stronger Scriptural support. John, as a Jew, raised in the Hebrew Scriptures that were his Bible, knew that the seventh-day Sabbath was the day blessed by God and

set aside as holy. In Isaiah 58:13, God refers to the Sabbath as "my holy day"; *"If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my holy day…"*; Similarly, the Fourth Commandment says "...for *the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God."*

Furthermore Jesus Himself made reference to His ownership of the Sabbath during His walk through the cornfield. In Mark 2:28 (and its companion passage, Matthew 12:8), He states that the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.

Therefore if John was referring to a day of the week, it can only be the seventh-day Sabbath he was referring to. However, the context of the passage supports the idea that John was in the spirit concerning 'the day of the Lord', and this may well be the best interpretation if we make some allowances for John's style of Greek.

This discussion, which has the potential to generate quite strong feelings, really boils down to the argument between Tradition and Scripture. For it is widely accepted that John was referring to Sunday in this passage. *Sola Scriptura* leaves no room for interpretations based on tradition, yet traditions become an integral part of our society and its values. Some Christians, especially those of Roman Catholic heritage give tradition a standing equal to, or even above, Scripture. Others, of Protestant background, place the Scriptures high above tradition, yet still default to tradition in situations like this.

Yet there is an issue here that needs to be addressed if we are to do justice to this passage. Most of the Christian world accepts without question that the expression "The Lord's Day" refers to Sunday, the first day of the week. If they are correct then we must assume that the seventh-day Sabbath had been dropped by Christians even during the lifetime of the apostles.

But what is the likelihood of that happening? Given the sacredness that Jews placed upon the Law of God, is it really possible that the fourth commandment, to remember the seventh-day Sabbath, could be changed without any New Testament reference to the event? When one recalls the hullabaloo that was raised by some Jewish Christians when it was suggested that Gentile Christians not be circumcised (see Acts 15), it seems inconceivable that the Sabbath could have been changed, without even a mention, by the time John wrote the book of Revelation.

1-5 The Incomparable Jesus[9]

Rev 1:12-20

> *I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. Having turned, I saw seven golden lampstands.*
> *13 And in the midst of the lampstands was one like a son of man, clothed with a robe reaching down to his feet, and with a golden sash around his chest.*
> *14 His head and his hair were white as white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire.*
> *15 His feet were like burnished brass, as if it had been refined in a furnace. His voice was like the voice of many waters.*
> *16 He had seven stars in his right hand. Out of his mouth proceeded a sharp two-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining at its brightest.*
> *17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet like a dead man. He laid his right hand on me, saying, "Don't be afraid. I am the first and the last,*
> *18 and the Living one. I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. I have the keys of Death and of Hades.*
> *19 Write therefore the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will happen hereafter;*
> *20 the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands. The seven stars are the angels of the seven assemblies. The seven lampstands are seven assemblies.*

Lampstands

The mention of seven golden lampstands immediately indicates to us that John is looking into the Holy Place of the heavenly Temple or Sanctuary. The Sanctuary first established by Moses in the desert, and later by Solomon at Jerusalem was the central feature of Hebrew worship. It consisted essentially of two apartments separated from each other by a curtain. In the first apartment, known as the Holy Place, there were three items of furniture; the table containing 12 loaves of bread, the altar of incense, and the Menorah or seven-branched lampstand. The second apartment, known as the Most Holy

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9 The title, "The Incomparable Jesus", or "The Incomparable Christ" has been used by several authors and preachers including John Stott published by IVP, 2014.

Place, contained just one piece of furniture, the Ark of the Covenant that held within it the stone tables of the Law – the Ten Commandments - given by God Himself. Into this apartment only the High Priest could come, and then only once per year on *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement – or Judgment Day.

Thus the first apartment was a place of intercession and the second, of judgment. In the first apartment the priest would minister daily presenting the sins of the people before God for forgiveness. In the second he would, on *Yom Kippur,* take the blood of the sacrificial goat representing the sins of the people, and sprinkle it before the Ark of the Covenant. When he came out, the sins of the people would be placed symbolically on the head of another goat, the scapegoat, which would then be taken far out into the desert and abandoned there.

The Being that John sees walking among the lampstands identifies Himself in verse 18 as none other than Jesus Christ. Interestingly, the description John gives of Him is the same as that given by the prophet Daniel when he saw the Ancient of Days sit in judgment of the Beast in Daniel 7:9-14. While John sees Him interceding in the Holy Place, Daniel sees Him in the Most Holy Place. As we progress through the book of Revelation we shall also see Jesus our High Priest move from the Holy to the Most Holy Place.[10] When we reach Chapter 11 we shall need to take a closer look at the temple and its services, for there we will be told to measure the temple. There will come a day when intercession ends and judgment begins. Are we ready for that day?

There is much that could be said about the Sanctuary and its symbolism. To do so will take us away from the book of Revelation and into the fascinating subject of Jesus Christ in the Hebrew Scriptures. Suffice it to say that as we study Revelation we study Jesus. The discerning reader will note the pre-eminence of Christ in all aspects of the Sanctuary Service. Christ is the Lamb that was slain. Christ is the Intercessor who pleads on our behalf. Christ is the Menorah, the Light of the world. Christ is the Showbread, the Bread of life. Christ is our

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[10] The heavenly sanctuary appears to have the same design and 'furniture' as the earthly. However, there is no barrier between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place in heaven as there was in the earthly type. This is because the veil between the two earthly apartments was torn open at the time of Jesus' death, thus opening the way directly into the Most Holy Place. Hebrews 10:19-20 reminds us that since Calvary we can come directly into Most Holy Place through Christ's body and blood. John, who has been observing Christ among the lampstands in the Holy Place also sees the throne through an open door (Rev 4:1-2).

High Priest who brings His own shed blood before the Mercy Seat of the throne of God. Christ is our Judge, our Advocate, and our King.

Jesus said, *"You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and these are they which testify about me* (John 5:39). Little have we Christians understood the full meaning of those words. For in the people, the places, and the objects of the Hebrew Scriptures are found types of Christ. In Melchizedek the priest-king without beginning or end, in Isaac the miraculous child of promise, in Joseph the rejected, tempted, innocent provider. In Moses the deliverer, in Joshua the conqueror, in David the anointed king, in Boaz the kinsman-redeemer. In Jonah who gave his life for those on the ship and who was raised after three days in the depths, and many more.

Not only in the people, but in objects and events do we find Christ; in Noah's Ark; in the burning bush; in the sacrificial lamb; in Mount Horeb; in the rock struck by Moses; in the temple and its furnishings and services; in the annual festivals from Passover to Tabernacles.

All these lives, objects, and events were given to help us understand God's plan to bring sinful man back into harmony with heaven. More than that, they were given that we might catch a glimpse of this wonderful Son of God who is our Brother, our Advocate and our Redeemer, this Incomparable Jesus.

This passage represents the first of the seven Sanctuary scenes that make up the divisions of Revelation. Now the introductory comments are behind us and we must look at the first major section of the book, the letters to the seven churches.

Chapter 2

Some introductory thoughts on Prophetic Interpretation
Before we look at the message of Revelation, we need to understand something about the various methods used to interpret it. This is important because the interpretation differs according to the method used. Obviously we need to have a correct interpretation, and therefore must know which method will give us the correct interpretation. There are three methods that are used to interpret the apocalyptic books of the Bible, Daniel and Revelation: the historicist, the preterist, and the futurist. Let us understand what these words mean.

Until the time of the Counter Reformation, the established church's response to the influence of the Reformation, Bible students generally understood the books of Daniel and Revelation in what is termed the 'historicist' context; that is to say they understood the events of these books to cover the entire course of Christian history from the apostolic period right through to the second advent of Christ. They understood the first church (Ephesus) to represent the church in the days of the apostles, and the church at Laodicea, the seventh, to represent the church of the last days when Christ returns.

This approach however, due to Christ's condemnation of some of the middle order churches, is not kind to the established church. It was this approach to Biblical interpretation that led the Reformers and their Protestant descendants to identify the Roman Church as the 'Synagogue of Satan' (see Revelation 2:9, 3:9), and the Pope as the Anti-Christ.

The Reformation provided the first well organised theological challenge to the Church of Rome. Until this time the Inquisitors had been able to control effectively the consciences of the people of Europe, but they were no match for the academic superiority of the Reformers. Using the Scriptures as their double-edged sword, men such as Luther, Zwingli and Calvin were able to make short work of the unbiblical traditions and dogmas that had replaced the uncomplicated Gospel.

Alarmed, the Papal authorities looked for a means of combating the influence of the Reformation, and they found it in a soldier turned priest named Ignatius Loyola. Loyola's zeal for his church, and his alarm at the spread of Protestantism, led him to found an order of men

especially trained to meet the academic Bible-based arguments of the Reformers. This became known as the Society of Jesus, or more commonly, the Jesuit Order, often referred to as the "shock troops of the Counter Reformation".

It was Jesuits who popularised[11] alternative methods of interpreting the apocalyptic books. One method, known as 'preterism' is credited to a Spanish priest named Luis de Alcazar (?-1613) who placed all the events of Revelation back in the days of the Roman Empire and before. Therefore the preterist Antichrist was simply a local figure who is long dead. In fact, in this theory, the Antichrist is commonly understood to be a Seleucid General by the name of Antiochus IV Epiphanes who was particularly troublesome to the Jews about 165 years before Christ.

This view is still widely accepted today. For example, the popular NIV Study Bible has the following notes on Daniel 8:9 which identifies the Antichrist as the little horn which tramples on God's people: "The horn that 'started small' is Antiochus IV (Epiphanes), who during the last few years of his reign… made a determined effort to destroy the Jewish faith".[12]

Preterism would also place the book of Revelation strictly within its own local historical and political context so that, for example, the seven churches were simply letters to those actual churches, with no relevance outside that local setting.

The second interpretation was popularised by Jesuit Francisco Ribera, also of Spain, in a work published in 1591, and has become known as 'futurism', which essentially places the events of Revelation at the end of time when Christ is to return.

Over the years the fortunes of these two interpretations have ebbed and flowed with the more conformist believers tending towards preterism, and evangelicals, especially those of the Dispensational interpretation, often favouring futurism. Historicism, on the other hand has been rejected by the majority of Christians today, and is often not

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[11] Many Protestant writers claim that the Jesuits invented these alternative methods. Catholic scholars, however, argue that these methods were in existence long before the Reformation, and were just popularised by the Jesuit writers.

[12] NIV Study Bible, 10th Anniversary Edition, Zondervan, 1995, page 1301, 1303 footnotes

even included as one of the methods of interpretation. Today the major adherents to historicism are Seventh-day Adventists, and this is the interpretation I shall defend in this book.

Since the development of the historical-critical method of Bible study, Bible students have been led into a more detached view of the Scriptures that has placed increasing distance between the reader of Revelation and the personal nature of its message. Preterism, by making the Apostle John's writings apply only to his immediate situation within Nero's Rome, has made Revelation virtually meaningless and unnecessary for modern Christians. Conventional futurism has also had the effect of de-emphasising the personal nature of Revelation as the symbols and visions apply only to the events of the final few years of earth's pre-second Advent history. Hence, until that time arrives the book need not be treated as of vital importance.

Since the second half of the 20th Century however, there has been a resurgence in popularity of futurism, especially in the context of the Dispensationalist teachings of John Nelson Derby (1800-1882) who taught that the history of the world is divided into seven dispensations, the last of which is a seven-year period known as the Tribulation. According to Dispensationalists, the Tribulation commences when the righteous are secretly raptured to heaven leaving the unsaved under the full control of the Antichrist for seven years until Christ returns to earth to establish His kingdom. Because of the Dispensational expectation that Christ's return is near, there is nowadays a far greater emphasis on the study of the book of Revelation among Evangelicals.

As stated earlier, I believe the historicist interpretation to be the one most consistent with the intent of Christ in giving these words to the Apostle John. If Christ is as interested in the latter day church as he is in the apostolic church, it is not unreasonable to assume that the message is for His flock throughout the Christian era. Why would Christ limit this magnificent book to some local events at either end of the Christian era? The Protestant Reformers, living closer to the middle of that time would certainly have applied what they read into their own situation. They saw Christ as interested in His Church right through the ages from the first Advent until the second.

Historicism however, does leave room for local application of the visions, so that while it would understand, for example, the letter to the Laodiceans (3:14-22) to refer to the last day church, it also recognises that the letter to that church undoubtedly describes the actual condition

of the Laodicean church in John's day. Indeed these letters are far more than prophecies, and should certainly be read as personal instruction from our loving Saviour no matter what century we live in.

Therefore as we journey through the pages of Revelation, we will find that while historicism does not provide the most easily accepted interpretation – indeed it will disturb, and even anger, some readers - it will be found to be the most consistent and satisfying approach to this incredible book. In writing this little book, I intend no critical spirit, for we are all pilgrims on the same journey, and all stand before God in need of a Redeemer. So with these three interpretive approaches in mind, let us turn our attention to the first church, Ephesus.

2-1 Ephesus

Rev 2:1-7

> *"To the angel of the assembly in Ephesus write:*
> *"He who holds the seven stars in his right hand, he who walks among the seven golden lamp stands says these things:*
> *2 "I know your works, and your toil and perseverance, and that you can't tolerate evil men, and have tested those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and found them false.*
> *3 You have perseverance and have endured for my name's sake, and have not grown weary.*
> *4 But I have this against you, that you left your first love.*
> *5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the first works; or else I am coming to you swiftly, and will move your lamp stand out of its place, unless you repent.*
> *6 But this you have, that you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.*
> *7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of my God.*

The letter to the church at Ephesus follows a pattern that is replicated to a large extent in the letters to the other churches. Although not every element is in every church, the pattern is generally as follows:

1. Identification of the author.
2. Commendation.
3. Rebuke.
4. Admonition.
5. Warning.
6. Recognition.
7. Promise

Identification
Each letter identifies the Author using a part of the description of Christ in the Temple scene of Revelation 1: 12-18. These descriptions do not follow the order given in that passage; rather they seem to be at random. However, it may be that the description given meets a characteristic of the church being addressed. For example, we shall see the church at Pergamos addressed by Christ holding a double-edged sword. This is a most threatening posture, one that should give that assembly, or congregation, cause for great concern over its spiritual condition.

Ephesus however, finds its Addressor walking among the lampstands, a pose that suggests His total interest and absorption with the affairs of this church. A thought-provoking comment says, "We should remember that the church, enfeebled and defective though it be, is the only object on earth on which Christ bestows His supreme regard. He is constantly watching it with solicitude, and is strengthening it by His Holy Spirit."[13] It is comforting to know that while those who 'seek first the kingdom of heaven and His righteousness' often feel isolated by the world around them, they are the ones upon whom heaven looks with the greatest interest and favour.

Commendation
Those who have been in the position of having to point out an individual's faults to him will have frequently softened the blow by diplomatically identifying his strong points first. Christ also uses this method. The church at Ephesus shows a regard for Christian fidelity and an abhorrence of hypocrisy. They have diligently gone about the work of God and have measured what they hear against the truths of Scripture. These are characteristics that Christ seeks in His followers. Thus were the Bereans '*of more noble character than the*

[13] Ellen G. White, E.G. White Estate, Manuscript 155, Nov 22, 1902.

Thessalonians, for they… searched the Scriptures daily whether those things were so.' Acts 17:11.

Rebuke
Following the gentle encouragement comes the rebuke. The Ephesians have lost their first love. How many new Christians have discovered the ecstasy of forgiven sins and the newness of life in Christ, only to fall back into taking these things for granted as the years go by? As with romance followed by years of marriage, during those exciting days of discovery, we spend all our spare hours with the Word of God. Yet gradually other interests creep in and one day we realise that novels are more interesting than the Bible; that a movie is more appealing than a church outreach program. When that happens we too have lost our first love.

Admonition
The church at Ephesus is admonished to remember the original purity of its faith and its prior commitment to the things of God. When we have lost our first love we are in great danger of sliding back into spiritual death. Unless we take the time to reflect upon how we have wandered from the paths of righteousness and repent of it, we may fall into that state referred to by the writer of Hebrews who makes the frightening assertion that, *It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened...and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance. To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace* (Hebrews 6:4-6 NIV).

Lest the reader become discouraged by this passage, let it be understood that if read in its context, it becomes evident that the writer does not regard those who have lost their first love as having yet reached that level of forgetfulness. But he warns of the inevitable consequence of allowing the loss to continue unchecked.

Warning
In today's post-modern world where there are no absolutes, and where truth seems to be defined by personal experience, the idea of repenting for sins is foreign to many. It is not fashionable to point out sin, and inappropriate to question the low moral standards portrayed in the popular media as the norm. Even from the pulpit such warnings are seldom given, leading some Christians to interpret God's grace as licence to live without reference to God's holy law.

Yet Jesus began His ministry with the word, “Repent…” (Matt 4:17), and now He warns the Ephesians that if they do not do so, He will remove their candlestick from its place in the temple. In the earthly Hebrew sanctuary, the seven-branched candlestick, or Menorah, was located in the Holy Place, the first room in the temple. Here the priest would intercede daily on behalf of the repentant sinner. In the heavenly Sanctuary Christ is that Priest, and He continually intercedes on our behalf. God labours with His people, but He tells us that there will come a time when He has to cease interceding for those who refuse to repent (Revelation 22:11).

Recognition
Almost as though the Lord wishes to find excuses for us when we disappoint Him, He finds something in this church that mitigates his rebuke; their hatred of the sect known as the Nicolaitans.

Who are these people and what do they believe that is so offensive to a righteous God? Unfortunately not a lot is known about them; some suggest they are followers of the deacon Nicholas who was appointed at the time of Steven (see Acts 6:5), but the evidence for that is scanty. There is some evidence that they were a Gnostic sect that believed that salvation was to be found through secret knowledge imparted by God to his elect. Adherents of this teaching believed that attainment of such knowledge released them from the need for moral restraint. Hence they are linked in Revelation 2:14-15 with Balaam who sought to overthrow Israel by the introducing them to idolatry and vice.

Promise
The Greek language of the New Testament uses verb tenses that are not quite as in English. A verb in the present tense may be *aorist*, denoting a single event, or *continuous*, denoting an ongoing action. A good example of the use of the *aorist* is in Matthew 6:10, *Thy kingdom come,* in which Christ tells us to pray for a singular event, the coming of His kingdom, i.e. the Second Advent.

The word ‘overcome’, on the other hand, is *present continuous* and suggests that we must keep on overcoming. The Christian life is one of continual spiritual warfare in which the sword is not laid down until that great day when all wrongs are made right.

Each of the seven churches is given a different reward for overcoming; yet all seven rewards are for all overcomers. For Ephesus, the reward is access to the Tree of Life. This tree was in the Garden of Eden, but

will again be available for the redeemed of all ages in the earth made new (Revelation 22:2).

The Setting for Ephesus
If then we take the seven churches as covering the entire Christian era, what would be an appropriate time frame for Ephesus? Meaning uncertain. Some say is combo of *επιστρεπο*, permitted and *αρεστος,* desirable. Christ's letter to them suggests a church of some purity, but one that is in danger of losing its way. What better era for this church to represent than the apostolic church? During this time of spiritual purity, the Gospel came directly from the lips of those who had had an intimate knowledge of Christ and His disciples. Yet the Apostle Paul noted in 2Thessalonians 2:7 that "*the mystery of iniquity is already at work".* Whilst it is not safe to apply specific dates to any of the churches, let us place this church from the time of Pentecost until the last of the apostles had passed from the scene.

2-2 Smyrna

Rev 2:8-11

> *"To the angel of the assembly in Smyrna write:*
> *"The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life says these things:*
> *9 "I know your works, oppression, and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews, and they are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.*
> *10 Don't be afraid of the things which you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested; and you will have oppression for ten days. Be faithful to death, and I will give you the crown of life.*
> *11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies. He who overcomes won't be harmed by the second death.*

The next church for us to look at is the church of Smyrna. The name means "sweet-smelling" and is related to the incense known as myrrh which was given by the wise men to the infant Jesus. In keeping with its name, this church certainly presents a 'sweet savour' to the Lord.

Identification
Here Christ identifies Himself as “He who was dead and is alive” from Chapter 1:17-18. It is no surprise that Jesus uses these words to identify Himself to Smyrna because just as He died and was raised to life, so many of these faithful members were also to taste death for their faith. Christ identifies Himself with His people, especially in their suffering.

Commendation
This is materially a poor church, but rich in spiritual things. When we come to the Laodicean church we will see that it is a spiritually poor church that thinks itself rich. Smyrna also had to suffer those who said they were Jews, but were not. Were these literal or symbolic Jews? In Romans 2:28-29, Paul says that he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, but who is one inwardly. In other words a true Jew is one who does the will of God. Similarly in Galatians 3:28 we learn that there is no longer any physical distinction between believing Jews and Gentiles, for all are one in Jesus Christ. Therefore the Israel of the New Testament is not the literal nation of Israel, but is a spiritual nation, the kingdom of God. All who are true to God comprise Israel regardless of ethnicity. The people described in Revelation 2:9 (and 3:9) claimed to be Christians, and attended church, but did nothing for the cause of Christ, and were therefore not true Israelites.

Admonition
The church at Smyrna is admonished not to fear what they are about to suffer, for they are to be persecuted for ten days. Both Daniel and Revelation are prophetic books dealing with dramatic symbols such as beasts, horns, winds, crowns etc. Both also describe time periods in terms of days. Are the ten days literal or symbolic?

Preterism would undoubtedly see them as ten calendar days. But are they? It is important to answer this question because it brings us to a basic principle that will lay an important foundation for understanding much of what we read in the book of Revelation. To do this, we need to take a short diversion into the book of Daniel and focus on a fascinating passage.

The passage is one of the most powerful Messianic prophecies found in the Hebrew Scriptures. Daniel 9:24-27 says: *Seventy weeks are decreed on your people and on your holy city, to finish disobedience, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in*

everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy. 25 "Know therefore and discern that from the going out of the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem to the Anointed One, the prince, will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks. It will be built again, with street and moat, even in troubled times. 26 After the sixty-two weeks the Anointed One‡ will be cut off, and will have nothing. The people of the prince who come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end will be with a flood, and war will be even to the end. Desolations are determined. 27 He will make a firm covenant with many for one week. In the middle of the week he will cause the sacrifice and the offering to cease…

At first reading Daniel 9:24-27 seems obscure. However, it is not as difficult as it looks. We are simply told that from the date of the command to rebuild Jerusalem, a period of seventy weeks (490 days) will pass, after which certain things will happen. These things are the ending of sin and the establishment of righteousness, and the anointing of the Most Holy. The date of the command to rebuild Jerusalem is accepted by most scholars as 457 BC.[14] The decree is found in Ezra 7:11-26. [15]

This prophecy makes little sense as 490 days, but if each day is regarded as one year, then it becomes much easier to understand. An interchange of years and days is frequently found in scripture in subtle ways. For example Ezekiel (4:6) is told to lie on his side for forty days reminding Judah of their forty years of sin. Similarly in Numbers 14:34 we are reminded that the Israelites were to wander in the desert forty years because they had been unfaithful during the 40-day exploration of the Promised Land. As the Israelites came up from the Red Sea and entered the wilderness for forty years, so Jesus came up from the

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[14] See S.H. Horn and L.H. Wood, The Chronology of Ezra 7, (Washington, DC 1953), who first verified this date. Some have suggested that Ezra 7 decrees only the building of the temple, and not the entire city. However, Ezra 4:7-24 explains that it was the entire city that was being rebuilt and not just the temple.

[15] Some Christians believe that the decree is actually found in Nehemiah 2, which occurs 13 years later, making the date 445BC, and not 457BC. However, a careful study of Ezra 4, Ezra 7 and Nehemiah 2, for those who wish to undertake it, will reveal that the 457BC date is certainly the correct one.

Jordan and entered the wilderness for forty days.[16] Jesus Himself used the year-day principle when he said of Herod, *"Go and tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I complete my mission* (Luke 13:32). Similarly, when we reach Chapter 8:1 we shall see that the half-hour of silence in heaven alludes to the week of silence whilst the Children of Israel marched around Jericho; but more about that when we get there.

Such interplays between years and days help us understand that the famous 70-week prophecy of Daniel 9 is better understood in terms of years. 70 literal weeks, being less than two years, does not provide any historical satisfaction in terms of the fulfilment of the prophecy. But when seeing the 70 weeks as 490 years we can immediately make sense of the prophecy.

Therefore a simple calculation tells us that 70 weeks of years brings us forward 490 years from 457 BC to AD 34. We can also calculate without difficulty that the 69th week ends in AD 27, which of course, is the year of Christ's baptism and anointing.[17]

We are told that the Messiah is to be 'cut off' in the midst of the 70th week, i.e. midway between AD 27 and AD 34. This occurred on Calvary's Cross, and as Christ's life passed from Him, the temple curtain was torn from top to bottom thus opening once and for all the way into the presence of God, and removing the need for any further 'sacrifice and offering'. "*It"* was indeed "*finished"* (John 19:30).

Therefore this prophecy helps establish the principle of applying a year for a day when dealing with prophetic writing, and as we progress through the Book of Revelation we will see other time periods that are better understood by applying this principle. Thus we can know that in the book of Revelation when days are mentioned they are almost always years. We know then that the church in Smyrna was to suffer ten years of persecution, and not just ten literal days. We will return to that shortly.

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[16] The life of Christ in Palestine in fact plays out the history of Israel. For example, the slaughter of the innocents, the exile to Egypt, and the Red Sea "baptism" are all incidents that occurred in the history of Israel and the life of Christ. The reader, on reflection, can discover many such parallels.

[17] It is interesting to note the presence of the Godhead at this significant anointing in the descending of the Holy Spirit, and the voice of the Father. The time was fulfilled (Mark 1:15).

Promise
Now let us return to the passage at hand. The promise at the end of verse 10 is, "Be faithful even to the point of death and I will give you the crown of life". We see here that members of this church were to give their lives for their Lord. No wonder it was rich spiritually. We may wonder what it would be like to give our lives for the Lord. We wonder if we would have enough faith. Someone once said that should the time come when we need a martyr's faith, then God will give us the faith to be a martyr. Today though, it doesn't cost much to be a Christian. How many of us have been caused any real suffering as a result of our faith?[18]

Rebuke
The reader may have observed that there is no rebuke for Smyrna. God does not rebuke those who suffer for him. He knows they have enough to trouble them without additional criticism. God uses our trials to purify us and to fashion us into His likeness. Just as the diamond does not reveal its true worth until it has been in the hands of the cutter, so our heavenly Cutter works on us until we reach the full brilliance that the Master Craftsman intends us to have.

During times of discouragement the devil does his best to make us feel that God is angry with us – that He has rejected us. Yet we see in the church at Smyrna that God has no word of rebuke or censure for those who are suffering for His cause. The faithful Christian who lives for God may rest assured that any feelings of God's displeasure are not from God, but from the enemy.

The Setting for Smyrna
So how do we identify this church? Do we have enough information from these verses? If Ephesus ended about AD100, then Smyrna must commence at that time. This makes sense, for during the second century Christians suffered greatly in the Roman Empire. In fact they had suffered persecution since the time of Nero in AD64, when they were blamed for the burning of Rome. But during the time of the Roman emperor Diocletian and his successor, Galerius, between AD

[18] I speak as one living in the West. I acknowledge the intense suffering and persecution of many faithful Christians in other lands.

303 and 313[19], they endured particularly bitter persecution. These are the ten days referred to in this passage.

Then only ten years after that difficult time, in 323 AD, the new emperor, Constantine, accepted nominal Christianity and all persecution ceased. Therefore we can see that Smyrna represents God's people from the end of the apostolic era until the time that Christianity became an accepted faith around 323 AD.

2-3 Pergamos

Rev 2:12-17

> *"To the angel of the assembly in Pergamum write:*
> *"He who has the sharp two-edged sword says these things:*
> *13 "I know your works and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. You hold firmly to my name, and didn't deny my faith in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.*
> *14 But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to throw a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.*
> *15 So you also have some who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans likewise.*
> *16 Repent therefore, or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of my mouth.*
> *17 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies. To him who overcomes, to him I will give of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written, which no one knows but he who receives it.*

[19] In fact, Diocletian was relatively tolerant towards Christians, but Galerius and other influencers forced his hand. Galerius himself signed a treaty ending the persecution in 311, but it was not until 313 that persecution across the empire finally ceased.

Identification
In Revelation 1:16 Jesus is described as having a two-edged sword coming from His mouth. Now it is used to identify Himself to the church members at Pergamos. This immediately brings to mind the Apostle Paul's famous counsel to the Ephesians to carry *the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God* (Ephesians 6:17). Thus we may understand the sword to represent the Word of God.

The original language describes the sword not as two-edged, but as two-mouthed. Similarly in the Hebrew Scriptures, as for example in Proverbs 5:4, a sword, though correctly translated into English as two-edged, is described in the original language as two-mouthed.

The idea conveyed seems to be that the sword is used to devour ones enemies; *For the word of God is living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and is able to discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart* (Hebrews 4:12). Perhaps this helps us to understand better this strange image of Christ with a sword in his mouth rather than in His hand.

Commendation
During Biblical times Babylon had been the centre of pagan influence. The idolatrous worship that became such a snare to the Israelites had its basis in the system of worship devised in Babylon. Thus Babylon was traditionally the 'Satan's Seat' that is referred to here, and Babylon is identified throughout the book of Revelation as representing the home of false worship.

However, in the decades prior to the birth of Christ, Pergamos became the centre of a cult of emperor worship and built great temples including the famous altar of Zeus. Just as one cannot live in the Vatican, Amritsar, or Lhasa without experiencing the influences exerted by the faiths of those cities, so the influence of emperor worship, especially during the days of Diocletian and Galerius, was a permanent presence in the lives of Christians living in Pergamos.

Christ commends this church for resisting the influence of false religion. One faithful member in particular is mentioned; Antipas who preferred to die than to compromise his faith. It is possible however, that Antipas, which, according to the concordance means, 'like (or for) the father', was a symbolic name for all those who resisted the worship of the emperor.

Rebuke
The rebuke is a strong one and possibly explains why Christ identifies Himself with the sword. Pergamos is threatened with the Word of God because it has departed from the Word of God. Pergamos holds the doctrine of Balaam. In Num 31:15-16 we find out something about the sin of Balaam; he advised Israel's enemies that the way to defeat Israel was to weaken their society through sexual immorality. This would turn the men from the purity of their faith. It in essence the same sin as that of the Nicolaitans who are also mentioned here as being tolerated in the church.

Now the sin of Pergamos becomes evident; whereas Ephesus had totally rejected this practice, Pergamos is willing to tolerate it. Thus a compromise has taken place, and the church has allowed immorality and falsehood to enter its ranks unprotested. The easiest way out for Pergamos was to mix a little paganism with its Christianity. But such a mix is impossible with God. Do we compromise our faith and let little things slip by because we are afraid of being seen as a fanatic? A previously quoted author has made a thought-provoking comment, "The greatest want of the world is the want of men,- men who will not be bought or sold; men who in their inmost souls are true and honest; men who do not fear to call sin by its right name; men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole; men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall."[20]

Recommendation and Warning
The meaning of the word 'repent' is to turn around and go back. For to continue in the direction being taken by Pergamos means confronting the '*sword of the Lord'* (Judges 7:18) held by Christ Himself. Being a church member does not make us safe from Christ's judgment if we are not living in harmony with His perfect will. How cutting will be Christ's words to those who claimed to be his disciples, but to whom He says, *"I never knew you, depart from me…"* (Matthew 7:21-23).

Promise
Two gifts are given to overcomers, hidden manna, and a white stone. What are they? As mentioned in Chapter 1, the book of Revelation contains many allusions to, or echoes of, the Hebrew Scriptures. These often provide the key to unlock Revelation's unclear passages. What about the hidden manna?

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[20] Ellen G. White, Education, Review & Herald, 1903, p.57

Following the miraculous provision of manna in the wilderness, Moses and Aaron placed a jar of it in the Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 16:33; Hebrews 9:4). This was to represent Jesus Christ, the Bread of life who said, *He who eats of me shall live forever* (John 6:58). Thus the gift Christ gives in the hidden manna is Himself. He who fed the multitudes with baskets to spare will feed for all eternity those who come to Him. *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled* (Matthew 5:6).

There are no Old Testament allusions to a white stone, and its meaning can only be suggested: One is that it was the custom in those days for a jury to use a white stone for acquittal and a black stone for conviction. Another custom, which fits better here, is that a traveller would carry a white stone bearing the name of a referee. The stone was invariably broken in half, with the referee holding the other half. Thus a traveller who wished to carry a recommendation as to his character would carry a half-stone bearing the referee's name.

What time period shall we give this church? The name Pergamos seems to have little significance as it simply means "Elevation" presumably so named because the city was built on a 1000 foot high plateau overlooking the surrounding countryside.

So a logical start is the time when persecution against Christians ceased as the Emperor Constantine accepted Christianity. This became an era of compromise in which pagan beliefs were allowed to infiltrate the church in an effort to spread Christianity throughout Europe.

In selecting an end date, we will see that the next church, Thyatira, describes a great apostasy that overtook Christianity. Thus it is reasonable to place Pergamos from the time of Constantine until the time that the church fell into the apostasy described in the letter to Thyatira. This occurred from the 6th Century onwards, so it is reasonable to suggest that Pergamos ends at the time when the secular power of the Christian church was fully established out of the ruins of the Roman Empire during the mid-sixth Century.

2-4 Thyatira

Rev 2:18-29

> *"To the angel of the assembly in Thyatira write:*
> *"The Son of God, who has his eyes like a flame of fire, and his feet are like burnished brass, says these things:*
> *19 "I know your works, your love, faith, service, patient endurance, and that your last works are more than the first.*
> *20 But I have this against you, that you tolerate your woman, Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. She teaches and seduces my servants to commit sexual immorality, and to eat things sacrificed to idols.*
> *21 I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality.*
> *22 Behold, I will throw her into a bed, and those who commit adultery with her into great oppression, unless they repent of her works.*
> *23 I will kill her children with Death, and all the assemblies will know that I am he who searches the minds and hearts. I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.*
> *24 But to you I say, to the rest who are in Thyatira, as many as don't have this teaching, who don't know what some call 'the deep things of Satan,' to you I say, I am not putting any other burden on you.*
> *25 Nevertheless, hold that which you have firmly until I come.*
> *26 He who overcomes, and he who keeps my works to the end, to him I will give authority over the nations.*
> *27 He will rule them with a rod of iron, shattering them like clay pots; as I also have received of my Father:*
> *28 and I will give him the morning star.*
> *29 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies.*

Introduction

Christ, reminding Thyatira that He is the Son of God, looks at this church with eyes of blazing fire. This is definitely not a good way to be regarded by Jesus. During His ministry that look was reserved for those Pharisees and scribes who claimed to be God's servants, but who were hypocrites. Is this the problem with Thyatira?

Commendation
Even amidst the wrongs of this church Jesus finds some good. This tells us something important about our God; He is always prepared to find some redeeming factor, even in the worst of us.

It is their works that Christ commends. This is interesting, for sometimes we think that God's grace makes works of no importance. That is correct as far as our salvation is concerned, for works can never save us. But just as a tree must produce fruit, so the healthy Christian's life will bear fruit for God's kingdom. Works are not the means to salvation; they are the fruit of it.

Rebuke
At first reading it appears that the extent of Thyatira's problem was of a sexual and dietary nature. However, the reference to Jezebel reveals a deeper problem. Who was Jezebel? She was the non-Israelite wife of King Ahab who, we are told in 1 Kings 21:25, was responsible for leading Israel away from God and into the idolatry of Baal worship. Her story is found in 1Kings 16-21 and 2 Kings 9.

Throughout the book of Revelation, and indeed throughout the Scriptures, gender relationships are used as a metaphor to describe God's dealings with humankind. So many examples of this may be cited that the subject becomes an interesting study on its own. Suffice it to say that in the book of Revelation the church of God is described as a pure woman, as in Chapter 12:1, and the apostate church is a corrupt and adulterous woman, as in Chapter 17:3-6.

Again in Chapter 14:3-4 we read that the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth were those who did not defile themselves with women, and kept themselves pure. The reference to women is obviously not literal, for if it were we might be led to believe that only virginal men can be saved. Thus the symbolic nature of the passage under study leads us to understand better the adultery referred to as spiritual rather than literal, in which it is understood to be the worship of false gods.

In the historicist context Thyatira represents the church in the post Roman Empire period. It was during this era that Christianity began to develop traditions based on the system of worship that originated in Babylon and transferred to Pergamos. In verse 24 Jesus describes this system as one that teaches the so-called deep secrets of Satan. These "deep secrets" started back in the days soon after the flood. We find

the frustratingly brief story in Genesis 10:8-10. At that time a system of religious worship was instituted involving idol worship, appeasement (of an angry god), and salvation by works, which were in stark contrast to the simple purity of the love and grace-based faith given by God to man.

Admonition

This is what Jesus finds in the church of Thyatira. Yet notice that even now He gives opportunity for repentance. Jezebel herself, Christ tells us, refuses to repent, but those who commit adultery with her can still be forgiven if they do so. In other words, the false religious system that has been set up will never change, and we should never expect it to change. It is Satan's counterfeit system set up to challenge the truth of God. It will never change until the day Christ destroys it.

But its adherents are a different matter; for in Chapter 18:4 a plea is made for people to come out of fallen Babylon. God refers to these as 'my people'. We humans have a tendency to classify people and then to judge them according to that classification. Whist this is true of nationality or skin colour, it is especially true of religion. Yet God, who 'looks not on the outward appearance', seeks out those whose hearts are perfect toward Him. These He finds even in Babylon – even a Babylon that is about to be destroyed.

This example of God's grace says much to us about how to relate to those whose beliefs differ from ours. Especially does it say much to people who write books like this; for how do they write truth without indictment? The historical fact is that the Christian religion that emerged out of the collapsing Roman Empire departed so far from the simple beauty of the Gospel that it was barely recognisable as Christianity. It adopted pagan traditions and festivals, the worship of idols and relics, raised cash for its wars and cathedrals by the sale of indulgences (forgiveness for sin), withheld the Holy Scriptures from the people, and if that wasn't enough set up an inquisitorial system to weed out and destroy anyone who dared say a word against such practices.

Yet our long-suffering Lord sees in this system those who, had they been given opportunity, would have heard His word with gladness of heart and joyfully followed Him as did the fishermen of Galilee. These He calls 'my people'. Thus we must seek no attack; rather seek a way to bring knowledge of the Scriptures to those who have been told not to believe them.

The Promise
There were a few who resisted Jezebel; and to these Jesus says, *"Only hold on to what you have until I come".* This promise is not without significance. For it is the first reference by Jesus to the fact that He will come back. What timely words to those who suffer for His namesake.

A second promise is given in verse 28 - the morning star. What is that? Are there any allusions or other references? In Chapter 22:16 Jesus describes Himself as the Morning Star. And so He is; but those who use the NIV will find it somewhere else, and this presents a small problem. Isaiah 14:12 in the KJV refers to Satan with the familiar name "Lucifer" and the WEB we are using as 'shining one", but the NIV refers to the evil one as the morning star:

> *How you have fallen from heaven,*
> *O morning star, son of the dawn!*

In that Jesus refers to Himself as the Bright and Morning Star, we may feel more comfortable using a different way of naming Christ's arch enemy. Therefore, Lucifer, or 'shining one' would appear the better translations. In fact the expression "morning star" refers to the star that is often seen in the sky shortly before the dawn. Those who have studied astronomy will know that the planet Venus is relatively close to the sun, and therefore is often seen to rise just before the sun rises (as well as to set soon after the sun sets). Therefore people seeing Venus rise know that the dawn will soon break. That Isaiah calls Lucifer by this name suggests it was the name he was known by prior to his fall.

In the context of Thyatira, Jesus is reminding the faithful of Thyatira that the dawn is soon coming; that this period of darkness is soon to end. Thus it was during the period of Thyatira that the light of the Gospel was shed abroad by faithful men such as John Wycliffe, William Tyndale and of course, Martin Luther. These men God used to break the power of darkness and terror by bringing the Scriptures into the languages of the common people so that they could understand for themselves the Gospel of Christ. The morning star was a sign to the persecuted believers of the Dark Ages that soon Christ would come back and install the kingdom He established as the carpenter of Nazareth.

So, what time period shall we give to Thyatira? It commenced at the time when the Christian Church emerged out of the dust of the imperial

Rome in the sixth Century and continued approximately 1000 years. With the birth of the Reformation however, church history took a different turn. The Church lost much of its control over Christendom as Protestantism brought many back to a Scripture-based faith. Not only in matters of faith was this change evidenced, for with it came freedom to express scientific and political thought that would alter the face of society forever.

Chapter 3

3-1 Sardis

Rev 3:1-6

> *"And to the angel of the assembly in Sardis write:*
> *"He who has the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars says these things:*
> *"I know your works, that you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.*
> *2 Wake up, and keep the things that remain, which you were about to throw away, for I have found no works of yours perfected before my God.*
> *3 Remember therefore how you have received and heard. Keep it and repent. If therefore you won't watch, I will come as a thief, and you won't know what hour I will come upon you.*
> *4 Nevertheless you have a few names in Sardis that didn't defile their garments. They will walk with me in white, for they are worthy.*
> *5 He who overcomes will be arrayed in white garments, and I will in no way blot his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.*
> *6 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies.*

Identification

Christ identifies Himself to Sardis in similar manner as He did to Ephesus – by demonstrating His concern and interest in the churches. For now He holds their angels in His hand (1:16), a gesture of caring, such as perhaps one may hold a newly hatched chick. This is a fledgling church that emerges out of Thyatira, and it absorbs all of Christ's attention. We shall see that it spans that period of time from the post-Reformation period until the end of the 18th Century.

Rebuke

It is therefore surprising that Christ finds nothing in this church to commend it. To this church He says, "I know your deeds; you have a reputation for being alive, but are dead". This is a description of hypocrisy. They have a reputation for one thing, but are something else. To the adulterer Christ said, "Go and sin no more"; to the thief he

said, "…you shall be with me in paradise". But no hypocrite was ever given such assurance.

It would appear that we humans have difficulty in maintaining a spiritual vision. For as in the early church, so in this new movement, the vision gave way to theological dogmatism as reformed Christians developed their own creeds behind which they sought refuge. Gospel zeal gave way to formalism. In England those who resisted this, men such as John Wesley and George Whitfield, found themselves unwelcome in their own churches, which became more and more like the ones they had left.

It was not just religious formalism that led to the decline in Sardis' spirituality; it could also be attributed to the fact that their new found freedom of religion was accompanied by freedom of political and scientific thought. Sardis was the era in which ideas flourished, philosophies were born, sciences were developed, and industrialisation began to replace agrarianism. This era saw the transition from pre-modernism to modernism.

One of the more significant new developments of this era was the study of geology, which was to have a profound impact on the religious thought of man, and was to pave the way for an entirely new explanation for his origins. In the late 18th Century a Scotsman by name of James Hutton (1726-1797) observed that rivers had the action of picking up and depositing silt. Every year, he observed, rivers pick up millions of tons of silt and deposit them further downstream. Over long periods of time this silting causes rivers to change their course. Observing this phenomenon, Hutton came to the conclusion that the existing deposits must have required far longer to form than the church allowed for the age of the earth. In other words, the earth must be far older than was taught by the Bible. Out of this and similar ideas Hutton developed the concept of 'uniformitarianism'.

In the year 1795, Hutton published his seminal work, "The Theory of the Earth" in which he concluded with regard to the earth, in words immortal to geologists, "We find no vestige of a beginning - no prospect

of an end"[21]. Thus was born the idea that God did not actually create the world in six days. Sardis then was not just a church that fell into formality; it was a church that began to question the very existence of God and His claim to be Creator. While Hutton's words "no vestige of a beginning" challenged God's Creatorship, his words "no prospect of an end" challenged Christ's return. To this challenge Christ has an immediate response…

Admonition and Warning

Thyatira had been told to hold on until Christ would come (2:25). That was the first hint that Christ would return – a distant promise. But Sardis, as if in response to Hutton's challenge, is told, "*I will come as a thief, and you won't know what hour I will come upon you".* These words echo those of Peter in his general epistle (2 Peter 3:10), and are a reminder that Christ's return is getting nearer.

This warning of Christ's return suggests to us that Sardis is the church that brings the earth's history into what the Bible terms, 'the time of the end', or 'the last days'. How do we know this? Why should we, in the 21st Century, be locating the time of the end in the 18th Century. In order to answer those questions it is necessary to place a finger in Revelation 3, and spend a short time with the Book of Daniel. In Daniel 12:4 we read: *But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end. Many will run back and forth, and knowledge will be increased.*

The context of Daniel 12 is the end of the world when, amid a time of trouble such as the world has never seen, Christ returns in power and glory to rescue His people and establish His kingdom. When Daniel tries to elicit more detail from the angel, he is told to seal up the words until the time of the end. The 'man clothed in linen' then declares that the time of the end will commence after 'a time, times, and a half'. This expression is also mentioned in Daniel 7:25 and Revelation 12:14. It is also mentioned in different forms in Revelation 11:2-3 and Revelation

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[21] These words were actually written in a 1788 paper presented at the Royal Society of Edinburgh. Keith Stewart Thomson. Vestiges of James Hutton (html). American Scientist *online, V. 89 #3 p. 212, May/June 2001* doi:10.1511/2001.3.212. "It is ironic that Hutton, the man whose prose style is usually dismissed as unreadable, should have coined one of the most memorable, and indeed lyrical, sentences in all science: "(in geology) we find no vestige of a beginning,—no prospect of an end." In those simple words, Hutton framed a concept that no one had previously contemplated, that the rocks making up the earth today have not, after all, been here since Creation."

12:6 as forty-two months and 1260 days respectively. It is mentioned seven times in all (another of Revelation's sevens).

The explanation to this apparent riddle is not difficult; a 'time' is another way of saying 'a year'; 'times' is two years. Therefore the expression simply means 'a year, two years, and half a year', 3 ½ years. In prophetic writings a month is always 30 days. Therefore 3 ½ years is 3 ½ x 12 months x 30 days = 1260 days, or 42 months.

The historicist interpreter, remembering that the 70 week prophecy of Daniel 9 was understood when each day was treated as a year, applies the same principle to this passage and looks for a 1260 year period of time that terminates with 'the time of the end'. He starts his search with Daniel's other reference to this time period, Chapter 7, verse 25, and finds a deeply discomforting passage of Scripture.

Daniel Chapter 7 is a passage many would wish was not there, and may constitute in itself a major reason for withholding the Bible in times past. It is not a difficult passage to understand and the reader should, at this juncture, invest the four minutes it takes to read it.

The passage describes four beasts that come out of the sea. Daniel's angelic companion informs him that these are four kingdoms. They are in fact the same four kingdoms described in Nebuchadnezzar's dream of Chapter 2. They are in order, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. The first three are identified in Daniel 2:38 and 8:20, 21[22].

The fourth is not identified directly, but can easily be deduced. Following Alexander the Great's untimely death in 323 BC, his empire was broken up into four smaller states under Seleucus (Syria and Persia), Ptolemy (Egypt), Lysimachus (Greece and Asia Minor), and Cassander (Macedonia)[23]. Three of these states remained intact until Rome's 'iron monarchy' took control from them; Macedonia in 146 BC, Syria in 63 BC, and Egypt in 30 BC. Thus in 30 BC Rome became undisputed master of the world with the final takeover of the Ptolemaic

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[22] Chapter 8 describes Daniel's vision of the ram and goat, which are identified as Medo-Persia and Greece. There is no mention here of Babylon because Belshazzar's Babylon was about to be overrun by Darius the Mede.

[23] Historically speaking, the four states were reduced to three after about 20 years following the death of Lysimachus. The three states remained intact until they became Roman provinces. Therefore history books usually mention that there were three states rather than four.

kingdom, a story that has become popular history due to the well-known relationship between the Roman General, Mark Anthony, and the Ptolemaic Queen, Cleopatra. From this point in time, the Roman Empire became more powerful than any before it, controlling territories from Britain to the Caspian Sea, and the Nile Valley as far south as Sudan[24].

It is not surprising therefore that Rome is described in the book of Daniel in such dramatic language. In Chapter 2, it is the legs of iron that 'break in pieces and shatter everything', and in Chapter 7 it is something that Daniel cannot even describe, a beast with huge iron teeth that tears its prey apart and then tramples on the torn pieces with its bronze-toed feet[25].

While the identity of the four beasts is clear, the identity of the little horn that arises out of the head of the fourth beast has been the subject of much controversy. It is, however, essential that we understand the nature of this little horn because it is the one given the period of 'a time, times, and half a time (v.25). It is this little horn whose demise after 1260 years ushers in the time of the end. What are its characteristics?

It arises out of Rome (v.8).
Its growth uproots three of the existing ten horns (v.8).
It has human eyes (v.8).
It speaks boastfully (v.8).
It grows larger than the other horns (v.20).
It makes war against God's people and defeats them (v.21).
It remains in power until the time of judgment (v.22).
It speaks against God Himself (v. 25).
It persecutes God's people (v. 25).
It attempts to change times and laws (v.25).
It has power over God's people for 3 ½ times (v.25).
Its dominion is taken and given to the saints (v.26, 27).

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[24] Presumably, those living in the period between the death of Alexander and the rise of Rome would have assumed the Seleucids to be the fourth beast.

[25] Just as the iron legs of Daniel 2 had ten toes, so the beast of Daniel 7 had ten horns. These were the ten nations that comprised the empire, and while there is discussion as to exactly which states are represented, an accepted identification is Ostrogoths, Visigoths, Franks, Vandals, Suevi, Alemanni, Anglo-Saxons, Heruli, Lombards and Burgundians.

It is evident that this little horn's major interest is religious as well as political, its special objects of hatred being the saints, and its language blasphemous. It even attempts to change God's laws. This leaves us in no doubt that this little horn can be no other than the religion that emerged out of the Roman Empire, for no other power of any description can meet all the criteria listed above.[26]

In brief, as the Roman Empire fell into decline, Christianity gained a greater influence in Europe. However, three of the nations of Europe, the Heruli, the Vandals, and the Ostrogoths, being Arian[27] in theology, opposed the Church's power politically, and on the battlefield. In AD535 the empire faced an anomaly in that the city of Rome was not under the control of its eponymous empire, and the Emperor Justinian sought to bring it back under his control. This he achieved in March 538 when General Belisarius defeated the Ostrogoths, the last of the three Arian states, and in so doing, plucked the third horn from the head of the fourth beast of Daniel 7. Thus began the time period of 1260 years that was to end in AD1798 in an event we shall consider shortly.

We must remember here that the little horn had a religious agenda as well as a politico-military one. Therefore we must also consider events taking place within Roman Christianity; in doing so I will start with the year AD481.

In AD481 the pagan Frankish king Clovis invaded Gaul, a large Visigothic kingdom covering the territory that is today France. At this time the Franks were one of many smaller Germanic kingdoms, and were located in an area east of today's Belgium. Therefore, such an invasion by a small nation of a large one certainly bucks the trend when it comes to invasions. Although himself a pagan, Clovis' wife, Clotilde, was a Catholic and she persuaded him also to become Catholic, at least in name. It took Clovis several years to subdue the Visigoths who controlled Gaul and Spain, but in AD507, the now

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[26] In an earlier chapter we referred to the preterist interpretation of the little horn as the Seleucid Antiochus IV Epiphanes. While he probably would have been seen in that light by those living at the time, his significance would have lessened as the power of Rome overtook that of the Seleucids. He did, however, terrorise God's people for about 3 ½ literal years forcing them to sacrifice swine on the temple altar. The Roman leaders of the day did not take him seriously and nicknamed him *Epimanes* - the fool.

[27] Arians denied the divinity of Christ, claiming Him to be a created being.

Catholic Clovis fought the battle that would finally secure the boundaries of his vast Frankish kingdom, the Battle of Vouillé.

In those days the Roman Church was a relatively restrained organisation. Not one European nation was Catholic, and most of Europe was controlled by the Goths; Ostrogoths in the east and Visigoths in the west. Even Italy, the heartland of the Church, was controlled by the Ostrogoths. In AD507 the Roman Church was in the humiliating position of calling itself Roman, but with Rome being administered by the Arian Ostrogoths. As mentioned earlier, it took until 538 for Byzantine General Belisarius finally to secure Rome[28] from the Ostrogoths and for the Roman church to gain full secular and ecclesiastical power in Rome. But we are getting ahead of ourselves - back to AD507.

With Clovis' victory at Vouillé in AD507 the kingdom of the Franks extended from the Spanish border north to what is today Germany, and eastwards as far as, but not including, Italy - an enormous territory - and it was all Roman Catholic. This changed the politics of Europe to such an extent that the Byzantine Emperor, Anastasius I, who had regarded Clovis as just another tribal warrior of little significance, suddenly realised that the dynamics of his empire had undergone a dramatic metamorphosis. [29] With that victory Anastasius, due to his having enemies in common with Clovis, therefore honoured Clovis by, the following year, AD508, making him a consul of the empire, effectively crowning him king of all the Franks. Thus, in AD508, the recently converted Clovis became the first king of what is today France. Of this event a Catholic writer states: *This act is considered at once the foundation of both the French nation and the French Monarchy. Since Clovis was the first of the Germanic princes to accept Catholicism, he and his successors were called "Oldest Son" (and France herself, "Oldest Daughter") of the Church.*[30]

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[28] The Ostrogoths were not defeated in the rest of Italy until 540 when Belisarius defeated them at Ravenna. Even then though, the Ostrogoths were not fully conquered until about 554AD.

[29] For an informative and well-researched treatise on the significance of Clovis' coronation in 508, see Clovis, Anastasius, and Political Status in 508 C.E., The Frankish Aftermath of the Battle of Vouillé, Ralph W. Mathisen, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

[30] http://catholicism.org/oldest-daughter-of-the-church.html

Thus the year AD508 became a key date in the growth and spread of Catholicism in Europe. The historian Ralph Mathisen concludes his paper on the subject[31] with these significant words, *"It might not be too much to suggest that had there been no victory at Vouillé there would have been no united Frankish kingdom and perhaps even no modern French nation*". To this we might add that there might have been no Europe-wide Roman Catholic Church. Thus we see that as the Church expanded its territory and influence, it also extended its military and political power. With the coronation of Clovis in AD508, and the restoration of Rome to the Empire in AD538, the church attained full ecclesiastical and political control of Europe.

However, we need not, and possibly should not, rely on the dates of military campaigns to establish the history of the Church. While General Belisarius was removing the Ostrogoths from Italy between AD535 and AD554, taking back Rome in AD538, the Emperor Justinian was busy establishing a uniform empire-wide legal system. Between 527 and 534, he codified a number of civil and religious regulations in order to govern the empire under a

[31] For an informative and well-researched treatise on the significance of Clovis' coronation in 508, see Clovis, Anastasius, and Political Status in 508 C.E., The Frankish Aftermath of the Battle of Vouillé, Ralph W. Mathisen, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

consistent set of laws. This document, known today as *Justinian's Code*, was to provide the legal basis for the establishment and authority of the Church until 1804, when Napoleon replaced it with his own code.

The Justinian Code, was in four parts, the first of which dealt with ecclesiastical and religious law, and was essentially a Constitution, began as follows: "*The Code of Our Lord the Most Sacred Emperor Justinian…Concerning the Most Exalted Trinity and the Catholic Faith and Providing that No One Shall Dare to Publicly Oppose Them".* Addressing the Pope, the document says, *"…you are the head of all the Holy Churches, for We shall exert Ourselves in every way… to increase the honour and authority of your See".*[32]

Thus we see a legal basis for the Roman Church's authority in matters of Church and State. While the Justinian Code established a legal framework for the authority of the Church, the military recapture of Rome provided the means by which it could be implemented.

With France playing such a significant part in the establishment of the Church's power, perhaps it is divine irony then, that France should have been behind the events that occurred exactly 1260 years later to bring the Church's power to an end. As at the beginning of the 1260 years, the events that took place at the end of that time were also politico-military, but also had a legal framework to support them. The Napoleonic Code, passed into law in AD1804, was also made up of a collection of Bills passed since the beginning of the French Revolution. France rejected Catholicism as its state religion in 1793 during the Reign of Terror. Five years later, in 1798, the French General Berthier marched into Rome, declared it a Republic, and took the Pope prisoner. While the Papacy had lost France in 1793, it lost Rome in 1798. Berthier, in declaring Rome a republic, released a proclamation, which includes the following, "*… every other temporal authority emanating from the old government of the Pope, is suppressed, and it shall no*

[32] Source: Corpus Juris Civilis (The Civil Law, the Code of Justinian), by S.P. Scott, A.M., published by the Central Trust Company, Cincinnati, copyright 1932, Volume 12 [of 17], pages 9-12, 125. The title quoted above is from the Second Edition, Book 1, Title 1.

more exercise any function."[33] By this proclamation the new Roman Republic came under the protection of the Government of France, and hence a part of Napoleon's empire.[34] Thus we find that the military events that bookend the years of papal control over the souls and the lives of Europeans are exactly 1260 years apart, and from a legal perspective we see the Justinian Code and the developing Napoleonic Code, although not exactly 1260 years, provide the constitutional basis for the fulfilment of this remarkable prophecy.

With that event in 1798, the Church, for the first time since 538, lost its political power in Europe, the time of the end was ushered in, and the message of Christ's return began to be preached from the book of Daniel. Truly, when God gives a prophetic date, it is exact. Indeed, the prophecy of Daniel 7:25 is a remarkable one.

The purpose of revealing this history is not to make any attack upon the Church, for the church was us, and as we have seen, there is a difference between a religious system and those who come under its influence. The latter, God refers to as "my people", and seeks their rejection of this system that has evolved, not by malicious intent, but by a long process of decision-making without using the Scriptures for guidance. Such decisions have resulted in the loss of the apostolic Gospel to pomp and ritual, the Scriptures to tradition, the Sabbath to Sunday[35], and the Lord's Supper to the Mass.

This was the shape that Christianity took following the demise of the Roman Empire, and God placed upon it a limitation of 'a time, times, and half a time", 1260 years, before a period of judgment would commence (see Daniel 7:9-11, and 26-27). If that period of time commenced in AD538, then it terminated in AD1798 – during the era of Sardis.

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[33] Taken from The London Times, March 12, 1798, page 3.
http://www.thetimes.co.uk/archive/page/1798-03-12/3.html

[34] Ibid. p.3

[35] This actually occurred under Constantine some 200 years earlier, when due to a desire to make Christianity more palatable, he instructed Christians to observe "the venerable day of the sun" instead of the seventh-day Sabbath. For an in-depth study of this issue, see *From Sabbath to Sunday*, S. Bacchiocchi, The Pontifical Gregorian University Press, Rome, 1977

Thus it was in AD1798 that the Roman church received a deadly wound that cost it its political power, as well as, in some places its ecclesiastical authority. Additionally, with the new found freedom of thought, and development of science, it lost its influence and control over the people. We shall see however, that there would come a time when that deadly wound would be healed.

With that short digression, we may return our thoughts to Sardis, for with the ending of the 1260 years, the world entered that period referred to in Daniel 12:4 as 'the time of the end' in which *"many shall run back and forth, and knowledge shall be increased".* It is therefore appropriate that Christ would warn this church that they should be on guard, for He could now return at any time. His delay in returning is not due to the failure of prophecy; it is for reasons known only to heaven. But Christ in His loving wisdom gave us the parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13) for just such a time as this. The similarity of Christ's wording in verse 13 of that passage, *Watch therefore, for you don't know the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming,* to verse 3 of his message to Sardis is surely not coincidental. We must, therefore, ensure we have sufficient oil in our lamps in order to be ready for His coming.

Promise

Sardis is given a three-fold promise to over-comers: to be clothed in white robes; an assurance that their names will remain in the Book of Life; and that Christ will confess their names before all of heaven. White robes are mentioned also in Revelation 4:4; 6:11; 7:9-14 and, we are told, are given to all those who are redeemed from the earth. These robes are not simply a gift given to the redeemed; they are a necessity in order to enter the kingdom. Using marriage imagery again, Christ reminds us in His parable of the Marriage Feast (Matthew 22: 1-14) that only those who wear the wedding garment are worthy to attend the wedding. What is this garment? Is it our good deeds? By no means! Is it our obedience to God's Law? Certainly not! It is a free gift to all who are invited, and is for those who have been washed in the blood of the Lamb and made white (Revelation 7:14). In Isaiah 1:18 we are told, *though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow'.* Thus these robes are given to those whose sins have been forgiven. Forgiven sins are washed away and exist no longer, leaving the repentant sinner clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

The Book of Life
The Book of Life is first mentioned in Exodus 32:32-33 where Moses pleads with God on behalf of his idolatrous people asking that if God not forgive them, that his name be blotted out of the book He has written. Again, interestingly it is found in Daniel 12:1 as though giving us another hint that the secret of understanding these words lies in the book of Daniel.

In Matthew 10:32-33 Christ tells His disciples that if we faithfully proclaim Him, then He will do the same for us. Should we deny Him, He will deny us. There is a temptation for Christians to stay silent about their faith for fear of appearing foolish or fanatical. But there will be no sadder experience for someone than to hear Christ say, "Who are you? I don't know you".

3-2 Philadelphia

Rev 3:7-13

> *"To the angel of the assembly in Philadelphia write:*
> *"He who is holy, he who is true, he who has the key of David, he who opens and no one can shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says these things:*
> *8 "I know your works (behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one can shut), that you have a little power, and kept my word, and didn't deny my name.*
> *9 Behold, I give some of the synagogue of Satan, of those who say they are Jews, and they are not, but lie—behold, I will make them to come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you.*
> *10 Because you kept my command to endure, I also will keep you from the hour of testing which is to come on the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.*
> *11 I am coming quickly! Hold firmly that which you have, so that no one takes your crown.*
> *12 He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he will go out from there no more. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city*

of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from my God, and my own new name.
13 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies.

Identification
Christ identifies Himself to the Philadelphians as 'He who has the keys of David'. Strangely, the parallel passage in Revelation 1:18 differs in that Christ is described there as having the keys to hell and to death. Why the discrepancy? The solution is suggested in an interesting passage in Isaiah 22:20-22 in which Eliakim, the keeper of the house (2 Kings 18:18), is given the key to Jerusalem, the House of David. Eliakim, who also wears the robe and the sash as worn by Christ in Revelation 1:13, is a Christ figure who has the authority to admit or to deny entry into the earthly Jerusalem. Those who were given entry were safe; those refused entry would be killed by the enemy. So we see that the key of David is the key to life or death, and that the two verses are in harmony. Christ informs the Philadelphians that He, the antitypical Eliakim, has given them an open door no one can shut because only He has the key.

Commendation and Rebuke
In spite of their weakness, Philadelphians have not denied Christ's name. With Jesus it is the weak that are strong and the strong that are weak. Those who looked down on them will one day fall at their feet and acknowledge that Jesus loved them. As with Smyrna there is no rebuke for this apparently feeble church.

Admonition and Promise
There is no warning for Philadelphia; just encouragement to hold on to what they have, for Christ will soon come. The second advent of Christ is an event anticipated with increasing expectation as we go from one church to the next. From Thyatira to Philadelphia, the return of Christ is held before the reader as the supreme event that crowns the history of the earth.

Why was this weak little church so commended by God? The answer lies in the passage we discussed under Sardis. There we learned that Daniel's book was to be sealed up until the time of the end; then knowledge would increase and 'men would run to and fro' (Daniel 12:4). The 'time of the end' brought with it a resurgence of interest in the Gospel and in the study of the Scriptures; this was the era of Bible societies and revival meetings, temperance movements and health

reform, prison reform and the introduction of Sunday School. These developments brought about a new culture of educated spirituality in Europe and America. Most importantly, God was to use the imperialist expansionism of this era to send faithful men and women to the far corners of the earth with the Gospel. To Africa went Moffatt, Livingstone, Mary Slessor, and others. To China went Hudson Taylor; to India, William Carey. Thus it was during this Philadelphian age, a name meaning 'brotherly love', that the Gospel commission of Matthew 28:19-20 was carried out with a zeal hardly seen since the days of the apostles.

But there was another phenomenon that occurred at this time that is overlooked by most Christians. In fact it is popularly seen as counter-productive to the spread of the Gospel. Yet it is perhaps the most pertinent reason for God's commendation of Philadelphia.

To understand it requires a return to the Book of Daniel 12:4 where we were told that Daniel's book, or at least the prophetic part of it, was to be sealed up until the time of the end. We have already seen that this era marks the commencement of the time of the end. Therefore we should expect Daniel's words to be opened and understood at this time. It was during the late 18th and early 19th Centuries that there developed resurgence in interest in the Second Advent of Christ. All over the world individuals began to study the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, and quite independently of one another, came to similar conclusions – that Christ would return in the 1840s.

Among these were Joseph Wolff who preached throughout Europe, Palestine and the United States, Manuel Lacunza in South America, and a Baptist ex-army captain turned farmer, William Miller, who preached throughout the New England states of the USA. Adherents to these teachings, from all denominations, and known as 'Advent Christians' or 'Adventists', grew in number until, in 1844 they numbered, according to one estimate, as high as 135,000 people[36].

It is important to understand why they believed as they did, and why they were mistaken; for while they were, and still are, objects of ridicule to most Christians, there is little doubt that such a group, committed to proclaiming the soon return of Christ, were completely in harmony with the message of Philadelphia – *Behold, I am coming soon.* It is difficult

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[36] See Dick, Everett N. *William Miller and the Advent Crisis,1831-1844*. Doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1930.

to imagine that God did not watch with particular interest this sincere group, for their message brought about resurgence in spirituality along with a deeper interest in the study of the Scriptures than perhaps had ever been seen before among the general population. While they were mistaken in their dates, they brought to the attention of the world the one event that Christ wanted the world to know. Beginning with this movement there has grown a widespread awareness among Christians throughout the world that the return of Christ is imminent.

The basis for their understanding is to be found in a mysterious passage in Daniel 8:13-14. Chapter 8 describes, in symbolic form, the rise and fall of the same empires described in Chapters 2 and 7. This time the imagery changes and Rome is seen as a horn growing out of one of the four points of the compass[37].

After observing the rise of this little horn which becomes 'exceedingly great', Daniel hears the following heavenly conversation: *…How long shall be the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, and the transgression of desolation, to give both the sanctuary and the host to be trodden under foot? [14]And he said unto me, Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed* (KJV).

While most preterist interpreters are at a loss as to know how to place 2300 days or 6.4 years into any known event in Biblical history[38], the preachers of the Second Advent had no such difficulty. For them, the 2300 days were 2300 years. The question that interested them was when they began and ended.

Their answer was found in Daniel 9:23-24. Chapter 8 closes with the now aged Daniel's disturbed frame of mind over the vision of the 2300 days. The angel Gabriel has been instructed to explain the vision, and tells Daniel that it is true, but that it is for a time in the future. Chapter 9 then opens with Daniel's famous prayer of contrition over the Babylonian captivity, for he knows the seventy years of captivity are

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[37] A casual reading suggests that this horn arises out of one of the four horns that grew from the head of the goat (verses 8-9). However, the Hebrew grammar does not allow for that due to the gender of the word 'them'. It is more accurate grammatically for the horn to arise out of one of the four winds, a symbolic term for points of the compass.

[38] Some, such as the popular NIV Study Guide, suggest that 2300 evenings and mornings 'probably' refer to the twice-daily sacrifices – in other words 1,150 days, which are approximately the number of days the Jewish Temple altar was desecrated by Antiochus Epiphanes.

soon to end. While he is praying, Gabriel returns to explain further to him the vision, and tells him that seventy weeks are to be determined, or cut off, obviously from the 2300 days[39], before the arrival of the Messiah.

When we studied this passage in *2-1 Ephesus* we saw that the seventy weeks commenced in 457 BC. Thus the Advent preachers reasonably concluded that the 2300 days commenced in 457 BC, and hence ended in 1843 or 1844 depending upon how one calculated the year 1BC/AD.

For these believers, the expression 'cleansing of the sanctuary' was synonymous with the return of Christ. Thus when Christ did not return as expected, the ridicule they faced was insignificant in comparison to the disappointment they felt. Many were to turn their backs on Christ as a result of this disappointment, but others went on to a deeper study of the meaning and significance of the sanctuary.

As we continue through the book of Revelation we shall begin to understand the importance of the sanctuary and its services. It was this understanding that enabled the disappointed ones to gain a deeper appreciation of the 2300-day prophecy and what was really meant by the enigmatic phrase, 'then shall the sanctuary be cleansed'.

This snippet of history helps add to the significance of the Philadelphian era as one that had God's special interest. It was a time of resurgence in public interest in spiritual matters that has developed into a movement of Christians of all denominations the world over who anticipate the soon return of Christ in power and glory.

Promise

Is it merely coincidence that the promise to the overcoming Philadelphians is to become a part of the Temple, or Sanctuary? The Temple of Solomon, we are told in 1 Kings 7:13-22, had two large pillars either side of its entrance. One pillar was named *Jachin* meaning, 'He Shall Establish'; the other named *Boaz* meaning 'In It Is

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[39] Some have questioned the validity of linking the 2300-day prophecy with the 70 week prophecy, but if the prayer of Daniel in 9:1-19 is temporarily placed in parentheses and one reads around the parenthesis, it becomes quite evident that the vision of the 2300 days is being referred to in Chapter 9. A study of the Hebrew translation of 'vision' also supports this; references to the 2300 days vision are always *mareh,* whereas references to the beast vision are always *chazon.* Thus Gabriel in Chapter 9 explains the *mareh,* not the *chazon.*

Strength'. As the victorious Philadelphians uphold the truth of God they become as pillars with a name on them that describes their own faithfulness.

It is not easy to specify exact dates for the Philadelphian church, but it is appropriate to assign to it the era of great missionary and evangelistic activity that was seen throughout the world during the first half of the 19th Century.

3-3 Laodicea

Rev 3:14-22

> *"To the angel of the assembly in Laodicea write:*
> *"The Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of God's creation, says these things:*
> *15 "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were cold or hot.*
> *16 So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will vomit you out of my mouth.*
> *17 Because you say, 'I am rich, and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing;' and don't know that you are the wretched one, miserable, poor, blind, and naked;*
> *18 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, that you may become rich; and white garments, that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see.*
> *19 As many as I love, I reprove and chasten. Be zealous therefore, and repent.*
> *20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, then I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with me.*
> *21 He who overcomes, I will give to him to sit down with me on my throne, as I also overcame, and sat down with my Father on his throne.*
> *22 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies."*

Identification:
Christ identifies Himself to the Laodiceans, not from the usual passage, but from 1:5, the faithful witness. But why does He call Himself the *Amen*? Simply because the word 'Amen' means Truth. Thus in Isaiah 65:16 God is referred to as 'the God of *Amen* -Truth.

Jesus is also identified to Laodicea as the Ruler of God's creation. Is there a reason for this? The Laodicean period was the one in which the world, including many Christians, lost confidence in Creation as an explanation of man's origins. Today those who believe in the Biblical account of Creation are an object of ridicule, even from Christians. "You don't really believe *that* do you?" they ask in amazement. But Jesus reminds us here of the truth of His Creatorship.

It was in the year that 'Adventists' eagerly awaited the return of Christ, 1844, that Charles Darwin began the draft for his famous work "On the Origin of Species", which was to have such a profound impact on the thinking of mankind as regard his origins.

Yet Darwin's theory was not the only challenge to the Scriptures that was to arise at this time. The year 1844 saw the introduction of a number of philosophies that were to vie for the attention of man's soul. It was in 1844 that Karl Marx and Joseph Engels sat in a Paris café and first discussed the ideas that became *The Communist Manifesto.* It was in 1844 that Andrew Jackson Davis, the 'John the Baptist' of modern Spiritualism, began to propound the doctrine of spirit communication. It was in 1844 that Siyyid Ali Muhammad, proclaimed himself The *Bab* (Gate) and whose teachings gave the world the Baha'i faith that teaches the unity of all religion. It was also in 1844 that Pope Gregory XVI, in his encyclical, *Inter Praecipuas*, condemned the Bible Societies and all Bible translations in the vernacular, claiming that only the Catholic Church can interpret Scripture.

Why did the year 1844 see so much action in the spiritual realm? Here is evidence of a behind-the-scenes conflict between heaven and the Enemy of man. History is building up to a great climax in which the forces of good and evil oppose one another like David and Goliath in days of old. The seemingly impregnable fortresses of geology, evolution and scientific and philosophical thought tower over the Word of God whose armoury appears to be no more than a few small stones. Yet Jesus proclaims Himself to be the faithful witness to truth, the Amen, the Ruler of all, and bids those who put their trust in Him to

stand firm, for ultimately all false theories will be eradicated and true knowledge, untainted by the ambitions of men, will be made known.

These 1844 events were all beginnings of new movements, Evolution, Communism, Spiritualism, all of which have grown to become world-wide, and all of which specifically challenge the Bible.

Commendation and Rebuke
There was a hot spring in Hierapolis 10 kilometres (6 miles) north of Laodicea to which people would go to bathe. Laodicea had no such water, like other towns in the region, but may have received via aqueduct the Hierapolis water, now lukewarm. It was however, a very prosperous city in the time of John; it was so rich that when it suffered an earthquake in AD 60, the survivors requested no help in rebuilding it. These seem not to be characteristics that commend themselves to God, for sadly, Christ finds nothing worthy of commendation in this church. Instead it is rebuke that comes from His lips. Laodiceans are lukewarm, wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked, and Jesus feels like spewing them up.

What is it about Laodicea that could cause such a reaction from the Son of God? In that He is referring to His church, He is rebuking professed believers, not the faithless. This church thinks it is rich, and the reason it thinks this is because it has so increased in numbers and wealth that it no longer needs to depend upon God. This church has political influence, and can make or break presidents and prime ministers, yet its politicking has led to its spiritual decline. This church can present glitzy evangelistic programs that equal Hollywood in splendour, yet emotionally charged converts are won without any deep study of the Scriptures. This church experiences no suffering as it follows Christ in high-tech comfort, its cross comfortably suspended in a state-of-the-art backpack. This church is full of evangelistic zeal, but one thing it does not need, and that is for the Lord to return.

By now it will be evident to the reader that this church represents the final era of the church's history. This is the church that will be around when Christ returns. Yet as with Christ's first Advent, only a small remnant look for the event with the eagerness that Christ hopes to see in His church.

Admonition
There are three parts to the admonition: to buy gold refined in the fire, to buy white clothes to cover their nakedness, and to buy eye ointment in order to see.

Laodicea was a city of gold. One year the Jews in Laodicea contributed nearly 10kg of gold for the temple in Jerusalem. That was a donation from just one small community in Laodicea. Gold tried in the fire refers to the process of refining it to make it pure. The gold is heated until the dross comes to the surface; when it is removed the pure gold remains. By allowing trials and difficulties into our lives, Christ refines us, removing our 'dross', so that only the gold remains, fashioned in the likeness of Christ Himself.

One of Laodicea's sources of wealth was from black wool. Christ admonishes us to purchase from him white raiment. From this allusion to Eden, where Adam and Eve attempted to cover their nakedness with garments made by their own hands, we learn that our sins can be covered only by garments made by God. These are the robes of Christ's righteousness without which we have no entrance to heaven.

Another source of Laodicean fame was their medical school which was famous for its use of eye ointment. Thus Christ uses this analogy to help us understand the necessity to see clearly the meaning of the message He is trying to tell us.

Promise
To Thyatira Jesus promised the Morning Star. To Sardis He would come unexpectedly. To Philadelphia He would come soon. To Laodicea He says, *I stand at the door and knock.* Christ is a little closer with each church, but now that He is here we seem to have closed the door in His face. This passage has a profound allusion that helps us understand the intimacy Christ feels for the Laodicean church. It is to the Song of Solomon 5:2-8. The passage tells of a young woman's desolation when she is too slow to respond to her lover's knock on her door. This passage shows the intimacy between God and His people, and shows Christ's desire for a deeply personal relationship with us. But it seems we Laodiceans have already washed our feet, and don't want to soil them again.

The promise to Laodicea brings us to the end of the letters to the seven churches. They have covered the Christian Era from Pentecost through to the return of Christ. As we go into the seven seals we shall look at a more detailed description of the same time periods as experienced by God's people. But before turning to the seven seals we need to remember that these 'sevens' are each separated by a sanctuary scene in which John is given a view into the temple and sees something taking place there. Chapters 4 and 5 cover the next of John's peeks into the heavenly temple.

Chapter 4

4:1 The Open Door

Rev 4:1-2

> *After these things I looked and saw a door opened in heaven, and the first voice that I heard, like a trumpet speaking with me, was one saying, "Come up here, and I will show you the things which must happen after this."*
> *2 Immediately I was in the Spirit. Behold, there was a throne set in heaven, and one sitting on the throne*

In Chapter 1 John was clearly looking into the Holy Place of the Sanctuary because that is where is found the Menorah, or lampstands among which Christ walks. In the earthly sanctuary the Holy Place was separated from the Most Holy Place by a curtain, and it was this curtain that ripped in two from top to bottom when Christ died on Calvary, signifying that access to the presence of God was now freely available to all. This is undoubtedly why John is able to see the throne of God now from where he stands in the Holy Place.

In the earthly sanctuary the Holy Place represented intercession, while the Most Holy Place represented judgment. Similarly, as we travel through the book of Revelation we shall find ourselves moving from the Holy to the Most Holy Place, from Christ our Intercessor to Christ our Judge. While the torn curtain signifies that the way to God has been made available through the sacrifice of Christ, the apartments of the temple still have their function, and we shall find when we reach Chapter 11 that the theme switches from intercession to judgment.

4:2 The Colours of God

Rev 4:3

> *that looked like a jasper stone and a sardius. There was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald to look at.*

The three colours mentioned are likened to precious stones, and the Being on the throne is described as the colour of jasper and carnelian.

The stone known in ancient times as jasper was translucent, and today we would probably use a diamond to describe what John saw. The flashing that John sees may be visualised as the flashing that is observed when a well cut diamond is held to the light, only magnified many times. Mingled with this brilliance, is the red radiance of carnelian, giving the whole a most beautiful and dramatic appearance. Surrounding the throne, John sees a rainbow of rich green as seen in the emerald.

There are some similarities between John's vision and Ezekiel's. In Ezekiel Chapter 1, we find a description of the throne, but the colours are different. The brilliance appears to be more of an amber colour, while the rainbow is closer to the colour spectrum we normally associate with a rainbow. Ezekiel notes that while the brilliance appears as amber, it is sapphire blue that predominates in the heaven he sees. Rather than seeing this as a contradiction, the variance tells us that God is never constrained or limited by any one convention. God is the Creator of nature and can use it in any way He chooses.

There are other colours of God. These pertain specifically to the temple and its services. If we study the design of the Sanctuary as God instructed Moses to make it in Exodus 26, we find three predominant colours used, scarlet, blue and purple, along with golden ornamentation. Do these colours have significance? We note immediately that scarlet and blue, when mixed, result in purple. Could these represent the work of Christ in the temple services? Scarlet is the colour of sin and of blood, and is seen in the part of the temple service that includes the outer altar and the sacrifice. Blue traditionally represents the sky, or heaven, and was the colour of the rock upon which God's throne was situated (Exodus 24:10). For this reason some have conjectured that the original Ten Commandments were taken from this blue rock. In Numbers 15:38-41 Moses is instructed to tell the people to make blue tassels for their clothing so that when they see them they will be reminded of the Commandments.

The Ten Commandments, describing the character of God, were placed inside the Ark of the Covenant, the only piece of furniture in the Most Holy Place. Thus if scarlet represents sacrifice, and blue represents the law, we might expect the purple to signify the intercessory blending of law and grace that occurs in the priestly ministry of Christ in the Holy Place. When we study Chapter 17 we will see that false religion also uses the colours scarlet and purple, but omits blue. As we look into

that religious system we shall find that it is the Law of God that is omitted from its worship.

4:3 The Twenty-four Elders

Rev 4:4

> *Around the throne were twenty-four thrones. On the thrones were twenty-four elders sitting, dressed in white garments, with crowns of gold on their heads.*

With the letters to the seven churches written, John for the second time looks into heaven, that is the temple (remember that in the book of Revelation heaven is always the temple), and we are led into the next phase of the book, the seven seals. The events of Chapter 4:1 to 7:17 occur during this, John's second of seven visions of heaven. John's description of what he sees is quite inadequate. But how does any mortal describe God on His throne? That God veiled His glory must be assumed, otherwise John could not have survived the experience.

Twenty-four elders
No consistent interpretation of the 24 elders has been agreed upon. Here are four possible suggestions:

a. They are those that were raised with Christ.
b. They represent the 24 courses of the Levitical priesthood.
c. They are the 12 patriarchs (OT) and the 12 apostles (NT).
d. They are a symbolic number being divisors of 144,000

What we do know is that they are wearing white, representing righteousness, and crowns, representing victory. This strongly suggests they are human and not angels; humans who have not only overcome sin, but have lived lives that have entitled them a place at the foot of God's throne. It is unlikely that they are the 12 patriarchs and 12 apostles if only for the reason that John was one of the twelve apostles, yet was not among the 24 elders.

It is also highly unlikely that they represented the 24 courses of the Levitical order because the Levites were only a shadow of the heavenly

priesthood, whose function and purpose was made obsolete by the death of Christ when He became High Priest after the order of Melchizedek (see Hebrews Chapters 5, 6 and 7).

In that Revelation is a book of symbols, it is quite probable that the twenty-four elders are either a symbolic representation of the redeemed, or a number chosen from among the redeemed to represent them all. In Chapter 7:9 we see the redeemed of all ages before God's throne. It is quite possible that this large group would be represented by those from their own number.

As to exactly who they are, we are not told, but we know that certain faithful men, among them, Moses, Elijah, and Enoch, were in heaven at that time. We also know from Matthew 27:51-53 that several who were in their graves were raised at the time of Christ's resurrection. In that there is no mention of these people in the Book of Acts, it is quite possible that they ascended with Christ representing the firstfruits of the harvest which will occur at the Second Advent. It is therefore possible that the twenty-four elders were made up of these who were either translated or raised from death.

4:4 The Sea of Glass

Rev 4:5-6a

> *Out of the throne proceed lightnings, sounds, and thunders. There were seven lamps of fire burning before his throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.*
> *6 Before the throne was something like a sea of glass, similar to crystal.*

The seven spirits of God must represent the perfection of the Holy Spirit. In 1:4 the seven spirits before the throne bid the reader grace and peace. Here they are symbolised by seven fiery lamps, and in 5:6 they are seen as the seven eyes of the Lamb.

The seven fiery lamps of 4:5 should not be confused with the seven-branched menorah of the Holy Place which, we are told, represents the seven churches. Isaiah 11:2 says of the Messiah to come: *And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and*

understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD (KJV).

The image presented by the sea of glass is usually pictured as a great expanse of glittering crystal large enough for all the redeemed to stand on. This is a valid picture, but the scene may also be an allusion to the Hebrew Sanctuary. In 1 Kings 7:23 we read of the temple laver being referred to as a 'Sea'. The laver was used for washing so that the priest was clean when he entered the Holy Place. In Revelation 15:2 we find that all the redeemed are standing beside it (NIV), or on it (WEB, KJV). In Revelation 7:14 the redeemed are described as having washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb. Thus there is seen here the concept of an antitypical laver and the role it plays in our purification, for those who stand on the sea of glass have been symbolically washed by the blood of the Lamb.

Determining the exact identity of the sea of glass however, should not cause us to lose sight of the glory that is represented by this scene. In the next chapter we shall come to understand better the event that John was actually witnessing in heaven. This was not just a glimpse at 'a day in the life of God', but we are being given the privilege of seeing the glory of God on one of the most important days in heaven's history. More about this later.

4:5 The Four Living Creatures

Rev 4:6b-8a

> *In the middle of the throne, and around the throne were four living creatures full of eyes before and behind.*
> *7 The first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face like a man, and the fourth was like a flying eagle.*
> *8 The four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within.*

The KJV calls these living creatures beasts, but that is not the best word to describe them. The Greek for beast is *therion;* the word used here is *zōon.* It is better translated as "living being" and not as an animal. Who they are we are not told. Notice that Ezekiel also saw them (Ezekiel Chapter 1). Both Ezekiel and John saw them in the

Temple in the centre of the throne area. Both men describe them in terms of a man, a lion, an ox and an eagle. Perhaps these symbolise attributes of Christ – wisdom, royalty, strength, omniscience.

4:6 Holy, Holy, Holy

Rev 4:8b-11

> *They have no rest day and night, saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come!"*
> *9 When the living creatures give glory, honor, and thanks to him who sits on the throne, to him who lives forever and ever,*
> *10 the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives forever and ever, and throw their crowns before the throne, saying,*
> *11 "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, the Holy One, to receive the glory, the honor, and the power, for you created all things, and because of your desire they existed, and were created!"*

The worship scene pictured here should cause us mortals to hang our sinful heads in shame. These glorious sinless inhabitants of heaven never cease to worship God; it is their joy. Yet even those of us who do not use the name of the Son of God as a swearword will come into his sanctuary in a frame of mind far removed from that of these holy beings. Yet God, in His mercy, bears with us. Amazing grace!

In Chapters 4 and 5 of Revelation there is a progression in the worship of God. Initially we see the 4 living beings open with a refrain of "Holy Holy Holy". Then the 24 elders cast their crowns of victory before the throne and cry out, "You are worthy, O Lord…" As we study Chapter 5 we shall see this worship build up to a magnificent crescendo that involves the entire universe. How puny are our feeble praises when compared to the magnificence of this scene. Yet this glorious worship scene gives us a clue as to the incredible event that John is about to witness in the Chapter to which we shall now turn our attention.

Chapter 5

5-1 The Scroll

Rev 5:1-4

> *I saw, in the right hand of him who sat on the throne, a book written inside and outside, sealed shut with seven seals.*
> *2 I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the book, and to break its seals?"*
> *3 No one in heaven above, or on the earth, or under the earth, was able to open the book or to look in it.*
> *4 Then I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look in it.*

What could be so important about this scroll that John weeps because no one can open it? He must have understood its importance, but we are uninformed as to its contents; we can only surmise. The scroll, for it was not a book in the sense that we understand the term, is written on both sides which suggests that it contained a large amount of information.

So what could this scroll contain? And why is it sealed? One possibility is that it is the Book of Life. We would also weep if that could not be opened because without it we could not know who could be saved. But the Book of Life is opened at the judgment, and this is not a judgment scene. Additionally, the two passages in which the Book of Life is opened, Daniel 7:10 and Revelation 20:12, make no reference to its being sealed.

A seal is placed on a document for two reasons, firstly to protect it against unauthorised eyes, and secondly to give it authority. This document is sealed with seven seals, representing completeness, perhaps the total impossibility of opening the scroll except by the one who's right it is to do so.

The contents of the scroll are a mystery. There is nowhere in Revelation that specifically states what is in the scroll. We would have expected that when the seventh seal has been removed then the scroll would be opened. But the narrative continues with the sounding of the seven trumpets without any break. It has been suggested by some

scholars that the contents of the scroll are not for our eyes at all, but only for the Lamb's[40]. He is the only One who has earned the right to open it and He is the only One who can act upon what is written in it. Indeed He is the only One who can know what is written in it. Perhaps if the Lamb were not worthy to open the scroll, then nobody was; and if nobody was, then nobody could be saved. John, knowing this, wept when he thought there was nobody to open it. Perhaps then, the scroll contains the information required to vindicate the righteous and justify the condemnation of the unsaved.

Even though the Scriptures are silent on this point, the reader may still wish to identify the point in the narrative where the scroll is actually opened. This is not so easy to determine, for when the seventh seal is opened, the seven trumpets begin to sound. Thus we are left wondering if the seven trumpets sound after the scroll is opened, or if they are still a part of the seventh seal. If the former, then the scroll is opened at the end of Chapter 7 or early in Chapter 8. If the latter, then the scroll is finally opened when the seventh trumpet sounds in Chapter 11:15-19. I personally favour this latter view because it is at this point that we return to the scene of Chapter 5 and the twenty-four elders before the throne. This view into heaven seems to me to bookend the story of the scroll.

5-2 The Lion Triumphant

Rev 5:5

> *One of the elders said to me, "Don't weep. Behold, the Lion who is of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome: he who opens the book and its seven seals."*

There is no doubt as to the identity of the Lion; it is Jesus Christ. The allusion is to Genesis 49:9-10: and Isaiah 11:1, 10. The Lion can break the seals because He has triumphed. We saw in Revelation 3:21 that Christ overcame and sat with His Father on His throne. In John 16:33 Jesus tells His disciples, "…*Be courageous! I have conquered the world".* Thus we can clearly understand that the triumph of the Lion is

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[40] See for example, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ,* Ranko Stefanovic, Andrews University Press, Commentary of Revelation Chapter 5.

over sin and Satan. By His victorious life He overcame temptation and lived a sinless life. By His glorious death and resurrection He overcame the grave and by it gave eternal life to all who believe in Him.

We Christians have tended to underestimate the extent of this (the conflict mentioned above) conflict. Yet it is a major theme of the Bible. From Genesis 3 until Revelation 20 we find this heavenly warfare described. We find it in Job Chapter 2 as Satan brazenly challenges God; we find it in Isaiah 14 as we learn of Lucifer's pride; we find it in Ezekiel 28, as we see Satan's fall from heaven as a metaphorical king of Tyre. We hear Jesus say, *I watched Satan fall from heaven like a lightning flash* (Luke 10:18).

A highly significant event in this conflict occurred when Jesus went into the wilderness at the beginning of His ministry. Little do we realise the significance of what happened there. Regarding the forbidden fruit, the first Adam had been told, "*You shall not eat it".* But he had failed to obey that command. By his disobedience the first Adam had, in effect, acknowledged Satan as lord of this planet. Thus was the usurper able to represent earth when the sons of God met before the Lord in the days of Job (Job 2:1-2). When Adam took the fruit, that special relationship between God and sinless humanity was lost.

In challenging the first Adam, Satan planned to become prince of this world; but by challenging Christ, the Second Adam, he schemed to become prince of the universe, and to receive the worship of all heaven including Christ.

Thus the wilderness event was pivotal in the conflict between good and evil. Adam's issue had been obedience over appetite, and at the point where man's downfall began, so his redemption was to begin. The point at which the relationship was broken was the point at which it had to be repaired.

But where the first Adam had food to satisfy an army at his disposal, the second chose to fast for the duration of the battle. Where the first had been in the full vigour of youthful health, the second was physically weak to the point of collapse. Where the first had come straight from the Creator's hand, bearing a sinless perfection, the second came into a world worn down by generations of sin. Where the first had been in a paradise, the second was in a barren wasteland.

For forty days the Holy One agonised over the future of humankind. At any time He could return to His Father in heaven, and again receive the adoration He was due. Humankind is owed nothing by God. By rights man should pay the price for his sins so that justice can be done, and harmony restored to heaven. But Love is more powerful than harmony; and Love mingles justice with mercy. Instead of returning to the Father, Christ stayed the course, and even though weak and emaciated, He gave Satan the reply that the first Adam should have given all those millennia before, *"It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God".* The victory was won, and throughout eternity the redeemed will wonder at the grace which caused the Holy One to pay the price he was ultimately to pay in redeeming them.

In His victory in the wilderness, Christ brought to nothing Satan's ambitions to rule the universe. From that time on Satan was a defeated foe. His only chance now lay in Calvary. The hatred demonstrated toward Christ that Good Friday can only be understood in the fury of Satan. It was Satan who drove the crowd into that frenzied cry of "crucify him, crucify him". It was Satan who led the mockery and the scorn. It was Satan who drove the priests to Pilate to have Christ's body sealed in the tomb forever, to be rid of Him once and for all. But in his rage against the Saviour, Satan revealed to an incredulous universe the true nature of his enmity toward Christ. When the angels of heaven saw their beloved Commander hanging on the cross, Satan's true intent was understood by all; and when on that victorious Sunday Christ arose from the tomb, Satan's schemes all came to nothing.

> *Therefore rejoice, you heavens*
> *and you who dwell in them!*
> *But woe to the earth and the sea,*
> *because the devil has gone down to you!*
> *He is filled with fury,*
> *because he knows that his time is short."* (Rev 12:12)

5-3 The Lamb Slain

Rev 5:6-7

> *I saw in the middle of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the middle of the elders, a Lamb*

standing, as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth.
7 Then he came, and he took it out of the right hand of him who sat on the throne.

Here is another instance in which symbolism is important. We should not attempt to explain John's vision in literal terms; rather we should seek to understand the symbolism. The Lamb obviously represents Christ, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world; the seven horns symbolise perfect power; the seven eyes represent perfect wisdom; and are here identified as the Sprit of God just as they were in Revelation 4:5.

It is significant that the Lamb has been slain. Sacrificial lambs were sacrificed by having their throats cut so that the blood could run freely from the wound. The image John sees suggests that the wound was fresh, and that the sacrifice had only recently occurred. This is important in understanding the event that is taking place here. The following passage will help us to understand further the significance of this scene.

5-4 The New Song

Rev 5:8-14

Now when he had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.
9 They sang a new song, saying,
"You are worthy to take the book
and to open its seals:
for you were killed,
and bought us for God with your blood
out of every tribe, language, people, and nation,
10 and made us kings and priests to our God,
and we will reign on the earth."
11 I saw, and I heard something like a voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders. The

number of them was ten thousands of ten thousands, and thousands of thousands;
12 saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who has been killed to receive the power, wealth, wisdom, strength, honour, glory, and blessing!"
13 I heard every created thing which is in heaven, on the earth, under the earth, on the sea, and everything in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb be the blessing, the honour, the glory, and the dominion, forever and ever! Amen!"
14 The four living creatures said, "Amen!" Then the elders fell down and worshiped.

These verses reveal to us that the entirety of heaven is engrossed in this scene. In attendance are angels numbering "*ten thousands of ten thousands, and thousands of thousands upon thousands"*. That is a very large number. What is this scene that has so totally absorbed the attention of all of heaven?

In Chapter 4 we saw the commencement of a progression in the worship of God. We saw the four living beings open with a refrain of *"Holy holy holy"* to be followed by the 24 elders casting down their crowns of victory before the throne and crying out, *"You are worthy, O Lord…"*

Now we see the living beings join the elders in singing a new song, a song that can be sung only by those who have been redeemed from sin. It is a song of praise to the Lamb – to Jesus Christ – for what He has done for mankind.

Then these are joined by the innumerable angels of heaven, who cry out, *Worthy is the Lamb who has been killed to receive the power, wealth, wisdom, strength, honour, glory, and blessing!"*

Finally the refrain is joined in a glorious crescendo – a heavenly 'Hallelujah Chorus' - by all the inhabitants of God's Creation – all, that is, except those of one dark planet which, like a lost sheep, is totally unaware of the sacrifice the Shepherd has just made in order to find it – the Planet Earth.

On that triumphant Sunday morning of the resurrection, a humble woman, redeemed from a life of sin, recognised the Man standing

before her by the tomb. In her excitement she fell at His feet and reached out to them. But Jesus said to her:

"Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" (John 20:17)

For the risen Christ there was one thing of paramount importance – to know that His sacrifice was accepted by the Father. "Touch me not… For I must present Myself, the Firstfruits of the harvest, to God. I must know that my sacrifice is sufficient, that I am not forsaken."

The day that Jesus died was the Passover. The third day after the Passover was the Festival of the Firstfruits when the priest would take the first ripening grains in the field and present them to God on behalf of the people. Just as the death of Christ on Calvary was a fulfilment of the Passover, so was His resurrection a fulfilment of the Festival of the Firstfruits. Thus he could not allow Mary to hinder Him until He knew that His sacrifice was accepted by the Father. Now the risen Christ must come into the presence of God the Father. One can picture Him as He holds open His nail-pierced hands and asks, "*Father, Is it enough?"*

Once His sacrifice was accepted, Christ remained in Israel for 40 days after His resurrection nurturing and guiding His disciples into an understanding of their new role as fishers of men. Then He ascended to heaven in a cloud, taking with Him those who had been raised from the dead with Him (Matthew 27:52-53). This is the scene of Revelation Chapter 5. It is the presentation of the Firstfruits of the Harvest and the inauguration of the victorious Christ to the throne of heaven. No wonder the 24 elders fall down and worship, for now their salvation is eternally secure. Perhaps some of them are among those whose tombs were opened on the day of Calvary; perhaps others, like Enoch, Moses and Elijah, had been in heaven a while already. What would have happened to them had Jesus not drunk this bitter cup to its dregs?

These events are better understood with a correct interpretation of Christ's words to the penitent thief on the cross. The punctuation, placed in the text hundreds of years after the Gospels were written, has led us to assume that Christ and the thief would be in heaven that day. But the events surrounding the partial resurrection at Calvary help us to see that Christ's words to the thief are better understood as, *"Assuredly I tell you today, you* will *be with me in Paradise".* For Jesus told Mary

early on the Sunday morning that He had not yet ascended to the Father. [41]

No wonder there is such praise in this passage; such jubilation. The Plan of Salvation has been fulfilled. Christ has walked through the valley of the shadow of death, and has overcome evil. Now he has ascended to heaven, and all the inhabitants are there to watch as He takes the scroll from the Father. The Lamb has been slain and the price has been paid. Now all heaven understands the true nature of evil and the perfect love of God.

Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory (Psalm 24:7-10 KJV).

[41] The implications of this have major impact on traditional Christian thought that the dead in Christ go directly to heaven. In fact it is the Resurrection that is always emphasised in Scripture, not what happens immediately at death. Those who are offended at this may wish to check the following passages: Job 14:12-15, 19:25-26; Psalm 17:15; Isaiah 26:19; Ezekiel 37:12,13; Daniel 12:1-2; Matthew 16:27, 27:52; Luke 14:14; John 11:11-14; Acts 17:18; 1Cor 15:52-54; Phil 3:10-11; Rev 20:5-6. There are many more.

Chapter 6

6-1 The Seals

Rev 6:1

> *I saw that the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying, as with a voice of thunder, "Come and see!"*

Now we can look at the seals that hold the scroll closed. We should bear in mind that the events of Chapter 6 do not describe what is written in the scroll, they describe what happens when the seals are opened, for a scroll would normally remain closed until all the seals are opened.

The first four seals, when opened, each release a horse and its rider, popularly referred to as 'The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse'. The fifth seal describes the vindication of those who have been faithful to God, and the sixth seal describes the events leading up to the end of the world as described in Matthew Chapter 24. The seventh seal describes, in highly cryptic language, the delivery of the faithful and their entry into the promised land.

Therefore the seven seals, like the seven churches, reveal the story of God's people from the time of the apostles until the second coming of Christ. The pattern is approximately as follows.

Ephesus/white horse,	innocent/victorious apostolic era
Smyrna/red horse,	faithful/post-apostolic persecution.
Pergamos/black horse,	compromise/spiritual darkness
Thyatira/pale horse,	corruption/Europe-wide persecution.
Sardis/call for justice,	hypocritical/loss of Reformation purity
Philadelphia/time of the end	social & religious reform/sealing
Laodicea/deliverance	Christ at the door/Second Advent

While the churches and seals detail the story of the saved, the trumpets and bowls (or plagues) will detail the story of the unsaved. We shall also see later in this chapter that this order of presentation is in parallel with that used by Christ in His famous discourse of Matthew 24. We shall learn more about that when we come to verse 13, so let us now look at Chapter 6 in more detail.

6-2 The First Seal

Rev 6:2

> *And behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow. A crown was given to him, and he came out conquering, and to conquer.*

Who are the four horsemen? And what do they represent? There are also four horses found in Zechariah Chapters 1 and 6. While the passages are similar, the reader will note that there are major differences between them, and it is difficult to use Zechariah to help understand Revelation.

Notice the symbolism contained in the passage. The rider carries the implements of warfare, and rides a horse, the animal of choice in warfare; the colour white suggests purity and that he fights for a just and noble cause. He wears a crown and rides victorious. There are two Greek words used for 'crown' in the book of Revelation; one is *diadēma* signifying a royal crown, the other is *stephanos* signifying a crown of victory. The crown this rider wears is the latter, and that he is given the crown suggests an authority in whose name he acts.

It is evident therefore, that the first horseman does not portray the sinister image usually attached to these symbols. In fact, given the splendid scene depicted in the previous chapter, we have seen that victory belongs to Christ. Therefore this rider portrays a noble cause. What more appropriate description could this scene represent than that of the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ in those early apostolic days of Christian history? The fact that the rider was given his crown suggests that the rider is the servant of God faithfully proclaiming the Gospel commission.

We saw that the church at Ephesus, meaning 'desirable', represented the church during the time from the beginning of Christianity until approximately the end of the first century AD. This was a time of great conquest for Christianity in which the message of Christ was spread throughout the known world in all its beauty and simplicity, and unadulterated by pagan thought. Therefore it is reasonable to suggest that the first horseman also represents this time period.

Having said that, it should be strongly considered that it may not represent this time period alone, for it was not just during the Ephesus period that this occurred. Throughout the centuries, amid great suffering and persecution, the Gospel of Jesus Christ has marched forth, its banner faithfully borne by, for example, the devout Waldensian Christians of the Piedmont Valleys, and by the scholarly work of the translators whose dream was that 'the farm worker might sing [the Psalms] at the plough'[42]. Even during the darkest of the dark ages, the good news of forgiveness and salvation brought hope to millions who were held in gloom by oppressive religious authorities. Thus the first horseman best fits the victory of the Gospel during the days of earth's history between the first and second advents of Christ.

6-3 The Second Seal

Rev 6:3-4

> *When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, "Come!"*
> *4 Another came out: a red horse. To him who sat on it was given power to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another. There was given to him a great sword.*

The second horse is red, an ominous colour, literally the colour of blood. Its rider appears to fight for a far less noble cause than did his predecessor. His sword is used, not to fight for truth, but simply to create misery. He wears no crown, either royal or of victory. This is somewhat disturbing, for it suggests that the horsemen are not of like mission. Yet whatever interpretation we give this horseman must be consistent with the previous interpretation; is this possible?

The answer to this is 'yes' if we see the horsemen as representing the spiritual experience of God's people through the ages. While the first horseman vividly portrays the exhilaration felt by evangelically-minded Christians as the light of the Gospel shed its glorious rays into the world's darkness, the second equally well describes the despair experienced by those who were forced to choose between their faith

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42 Desiderius Erasmus, *Preface to the Greek New Testament,* 1516.

and their lives. Not only were they fiercely persecuted at the hands of pagan emperors and religious authorities, but the simplicity of the Gospel was repeatedly challenged by false doctrines such as Arianism[43], Marcianism[44], and the teachings of the Nicolaitans[45]. Thus Christ admonished the believers of Smyrna to be faithful even to death, and promised them that while they would seal their faith with their lives, the second death would have no power over them.

We might also remember that Christ assured His followers that He did not come to bring peace, but a sword (Matthew 10:34). We should not see Christ Himself as the bearer of such a destructive sword; rather that following Him will result in the sword being raised against them.

6-4 The Third Seal

Rev 6:5-6

> *When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, "Come and see!" And behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a balance in his hand.*
> *6 I heard a voice in the middle of the four living creatures saying, "A choenix of wheat for a denarius, and three choenix of barley for a denarius! Don't damage the oil and the wine!"*

The third horse is black. There is no stronger contrast with white than black. Death, darkness, and evil are evident in this horse. The imagination here conjures up J.R.R. Tolkein's ringwraiths in search of Frodo and his companions. The reference to the scales and the high price for the grain suggest famine, or at least food shortage. The *choenix* is approximately one litre, or quart. The *denarius*, or penny, was the daily wage for a labourer, and a measure, or quart, of wheat was considered the amount a labourer would require each day. Barley was cheaper than wheat, and along with olive oil and wine, comprised the food staple for the peoples of the Bible. The suggestion here is that

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[43] The denial of the divine nature of Christ; that He was a created being.

[44] The rejection of the Hebrew Scriptures in the belief that the Old Testament God was evil.

[45] See *2-1 Ephesus*

food, while still available, is now precious and must be carefully measured out so that none is wasted.

So, what does all this mean? We have seen that the interpretation of the horsemen is more consistent if we see them as symbols representing the collective experience of God's people rather than as isolated events or individuals. Therefore, pictured here is a scene of spiritual want, a time, in strong contrast to the victorious image of the first horseman, in which Christ's church experienced apparent defeat.

Indeed such a time was experienced by Christ's followers during the centuries following the conversion of Constantine; a time in which the Word of God was held in chains so that none could have access to it. Unbelievably, it remained that way for over one thousand years until God raised up faithful men who were, for the first time, to bring the Scriptures to the people in their own languages.

One of these was a young German university student by the name of Martin Luther who, in around the year 1504, in pointed irony, found a Bible chained to a convent wall. "O that God would give me such a book for myself", said this deeply pious young man, whose soul craved the oil and the wine that God alone gives; who frequently flagellated himself in a vain attempt to purge himself of his sinful nature, as he drank in the words of life he found therein.

Day by day, as he found himself drawn irresistibly to this wonderful book, he began to understand how his beloved church had departed from the simple truths of Scripture and had replaced them with pagan tradition. Especially was he to come to understand that it was God's grace alone that was sufficient for man's salvation; that the good deeds of man were as filthy rags when it came to their ability to forgive sins and demand entry to heaven. In dismay young Dr. Luther watched as his fellow monks went about raising funds for the construction of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome by the sale of indulgences, cash payments in return for sins forgiven, and he decided to 'go public'.

Thus in the year 1517, on October 31, Luther published a document that was to change the course of history. It contained 95 theses challenging the teachings of the church as they departed from the Scriptures. On that day was born the Reformation.

6-5 The Fourth Seal

Rev 6:7-8

> *When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the fourth living creature saying, "Come and see!"*
> *8 And behold, a pale horse, and the name of he who sat on it was Death. Hades followed with him. Authority over one fourth of the earth, to kill with the sword, with famine, with death, and by the wild animals of the earth was given to him.*

The fourth horse is described as pale, but the word suggests greenish, perhaps the colour of bile. The rider's sword is different from that of the rider of the red horse. The the rider of the red horse carried a short dagger-like instrument (albeit a large one) used in close combat, like the one worn by Peter when he struck off Malchus' ear. It is also the one Jesus referred to when He said he came to bring a sword.

The 'pale' rider's sword, however, is the double-edged or double-mouthed sword we read of in Chapter 1. It is the sword of judgment, or execution, and was held by the angel who guarded the entrance to Eden.

This scene differs slightly from the others in that there appears to be two riders, one named Death, the other named Hell, or Hades. Some may assume that those who die at the hand of the fourth horseman must be the wicked because they go to 'hell'. However, the word *hades* simply translates as 'grave', and does not necessarily depict an abode of perpetual torment, just the place where the dead go whether they be saint or sinner.

Having said that, the role of the fourth rider, apart from the type of sword he wields, is somewhat similar to that of the second rider. They both bring death, the difference being perhaps in the circumstances that lead to death; the red rider's sword brings death in spiritual combat, the pale riders bring death in judgment against them.

It would appear therefore, that the death that came to God's people under the 'red' horseman was the result of their work of spreading the Gospel and paying for it with their lives. The 'pale' horseman, on the other hand, emphasises the persecution that has come to Christians simply because of the Name they bear. The reference to their being

killed by the wild animals brings to mind those early Christians who were publicly torn to pieces by hungry lions in the Roman amphitheatres. The reference to the famine and plague perhaps suggest those innocents who were left to rot in prisons because they would not conform to the establishment's credos.

The reference to 'a fourth of the earth' is interesting. It suggests that one quarter of the earth's population suffered at the hands of this rider. It is estimated that about fifty million Christians perished for their faith during the dark and middle ages. Perhaps this reference symbolises this number. We will also find, when we come to the trumpets and plagues, that God's judgment is visited upon the wicked over a third of the earth, and finally over all the earth.

6-6 The Fifth Seal

Rev 6:9-11

> *When he opened the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been killed for the Word of God, and for the testimony of the Lamb which they had.*
> *10 They cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, Master, the holy and true, until you judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"*
> *11 A long white robe was given to each of them. They were told that they should rest yet for a while, until their fellow servants and their brothers, who would also be killed even as they were, should complete their course.*

The fifth seal, when opened, reveals that the suffering of God's people described under the previous seals is remembered and rewarded. At last the righteous are to be vindicated and justice is to be done. The question of so many people for so many centuries has been, "Why does a holy God allow bad things to happen to good people?" This vexing question has led millions to turn their backs on God believing He either does not exist or that He has forgotten us. The truth is that God has witnessed and recorded every bitter pill that humankind has had to swallow at the malevolent hands of Dr. Mephistopheles[46]. This passage addresses that question.

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46 *Doctor Faustus*, Drama by Goethe, 1604

Souls under the altar.
Again the symbolism of the passage must be considered in trying to interpret it. The idea of millions of souls under an altar presents a farcical picture if taken literally. The Greek word translated 'soul' is as many times translated 'life', and suggests, like Abel, whose blood cried out to God from the ground, that the lives of those lost cry out for God to take vengeance.

The mention of the altar is temple, or sanctuary, language and denotes the fact that sacrifice has taken place. In front of the Israelite temple was the altar of sacrifice upon which the priest would offer the daily sacrificial animal. When the animal was sacrificed its blood ran into a container beneath the altar and thus, metaphorically cried out to God from under the altar.

We have also learned that in the book of Revelation heaven is the temple, and that the saved are always seen as being in heaven while the unsaved are inhabitants of the earth (See *1-3 The Coming King*). Thus the altar being outside the temple may be seen to be on earth, not in heaven, and the martyred souls under it are also on the earth where they await the resurrection of the just.

White Robes
We saw an earlier reference to white robes when we looked at the church at Sardis in Revelation 3:1-6, and saw that they represent the righteousness of Christ. The reader may wish to refer back to that passage.

We have in this passage a most important clue as to how God deals with the sin problem. We have all at times felt some anger at God for not dealing with the evils perpetrated in the world. Indeed, the situation seems to deteriorate steadily as more and more atrocities take place, the worst of which are frequently done in God's name. Yet God remains silent, and that can be hard to bear at times.

Yet we must ask the question, "would justice be truly served if God responded with a lightning strike every time an atrocity was committed?" Would that really deal with the sin problem? God is too wise to do that. This world is experiencing the fallout from Lucifer's antipathy toward Jesus Christ, and God in His wisdom sees the best way of dealing with it is to allow it, like a festering sore, to come to a head before He finally lances it and removes the pus once and for all.

So God tells us to be patient until all those who must still sacrifice their lives for truth have done so, and then when the earth's cup of iniquity is finally full, God will bring to pass His 'strange' act (Isaiah 28:21).

6-7 The Sixth Seal

Rev 6:12-17

> *I saw when he opened the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake. The sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became as blood.*
> *13 The stars of the sky fell to the earth, like a fig tree dropping its unripe figs when it is shaken by a great wind.*
> *14 The sky was removed like a scroll when it is rolled up. Every mountain and island were moved out of their places.*
> *15 The kings of the earth, the princes, the commanding officers, the rich, the strong, and every slave and free person, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains.*
> *16 They told the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb,*
> *17 for the great day of his wrath has come; and who is able to stand?"*

There is an important allusion to Matthew 24 in the first six seals, which enables us to gain a better understanding of the passage. For in Matthew 24 Jesus reveals three phases of the history of the Christian world. Firstly, He talks of the spread of the Gospel amid a world full of wars, diseases, famines, and natural disasters. This is four horsemen language. Then, as in the fifth seal, He describes the injustices perpetrated against God's people and their final salvation. Finally, in language almost identical to that of the sixth seal, He describes end-time events especially as they affect the unsaved.

This order of presentation is important in helping us come to a Bible-based interpretation of prophecy. Prophetic writings tend to excite the imagination and therefore lend themselves to interpretations that are out of harmony with their context. Such an example is found in Matthew 24 where a popular theology has arisen today. It is based on the words of Christ in Matthew 24:40-41, *Then two men will be in the*

field: one will be taken and one left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and one left.

This theology, known as The Rapture, teaches that the righteous are secretly taken, or raptured, to heaven while the wicked are left to be destroyed by Christ's Second Advent. However, there is nothing secret about these events, and we see from the entire passage that these verses, like the sixth seal passage, describe events as they affect the wicked, not the righteous. We read in Matthew 24:39 that God took away the wicked by a flood and left the righteous alive on the Ark of Noah. Similarly, at the return of Christ, the wicked will be taken away by the falling rocks while the righteous are left safe in the Antitypical Ark, which is Christ Himself.

The events described under the sixth seal involve a great earthquake, the darkening of the sun, the moon becoming as blood, and the stars falling from heaven. These are followed by the heavens unrolling just as a tightly rolled scroll or picture does when it is released, and causes catastrophic movement of the continents and islands.

The context would suggest that these cataclysmic events occur worldwide. To be consistent we should ask if they are literal events, or do they symbolise some kind of spiritual catastrophe? Given the words of Christ in Matthew 24, it seems safe to understand this passage as literal for this is indeed what we might expect to occur with the return of Christ.

The passage also alludes to passages in the Hebrew Scriptures; for example Isaiah 13:10, Joel 2:10 and Amos 8:9 all talk of similar destruction. These prophets were all sent by God to warn Israel and Judah of the coming judgment.

It is certain that God could use no event more effectively to gain humankind's attention than those described here. If today an earthquake rocked half the planet, if today the sun were to stop shining and the moon turn red, if today the stars were to fall from heaven, there would be no question of the meaning that would be placed upon it. Yet these events have taken place in the past, and when they occurred those who experienced them were convinced that the end of the world had come. It is only the final event, the unrolling of the heavens that has not happened yet.

On November 1, 1755, at the dawning of that Biblical period of 'the time of the end', an earthquake, epicentred in Lisbon, Portugal rocked most of the known world, being felt as far away as the West Indies[47]. Twenty-five years later on May 19, 1780 occurred what became known as 'the dark day' when, during mid-morning, night appeared to fall over the north-eastern United States for several hours. That night the full moon, when it appeared, was reddish in colour. Finally, on November 13, 1833, occurred the greatest meteor shower[48] ever witnessed by man. Again, it occurred over the north-eastern United States, the 'burned over district' in which was a major concentration of Gospel activity.

When these events took place the people were understandably convinced that the end of the world had arrived. But with the passing of time these events are largely forgotten or explained away, leading us who live in the 21st Century to expect similar events, but of far larger magnitude than those of the 18th and 19th Centuries. However, then timing and order of occurrence of those earlier events are a strong indication to students of the Bible today that the earth has entered the time of the end.

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47 For an interesting account of this earthquake and its resulting tsunami, see Sir Charles Lyell, *Principles of Geology,* p. 495.

48 Students of astronomy will be aware that each November a meteorite shower occurs within the constellation of Leo. The intensity of this shower varies from year to year. In 1833 it was the greatest ever recorded.

Chapter 7

7-1 The Four Winds

Rev 7:1

> *After this, I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, so that no wind would blow on the earth, or on the sea, or on any tree.*

Chapter 7 provides somewhat of a dilemma: is it a continuation of the sixth seal? Or does it stand alone as a parenthesis, or as a prelude to the seventh seal? It would be smoother if, after asking the question "who shall be able to stand?" we were able to go straight to 8:1, the opening of the seventh seal. However, to do so would leave the reader wondering who shall be able to stand during the days immediately prior to the return of Christ as described in the sixth seal.

Thus Chapter 7 is almost certainly not a part of the sixth seal, but is inserted at this juncture to explain to the reader more fully God's protection of those who are counted as righteous during this final catastrophic period in earth's history.

The passage is, as usual, full of symbolism, and in this first verse we read of four angels at the four corners of the earth holding back four winds so that the earth is not damaged. 'Four winds' are also referred to in Jeremiah 49:36, Ezekiel 37:9, Daniel 7:2; 8:8; 11:4, Zechariah 2:6, Matthew 24:31, and Mark 13:27. In each case they suggest the entirety of the earth, or the four points of the compass. In this case, as in Daniel 7:2, the winds also suggest turmoil and strife, and the reference to the land, the sea, and the trees also strongly suggests the world-wide nature of the terrors to come upon the earth once the angels release the winds.

This destruction appears to be that referred to in 6:14, which describes the devastation that comes on the earth just prior to Christ's return. Chapter 7, therefore, seems to switch the scene back to the righteous and what happens to them in the meantime. Therefore, before the earth is hurt, the righteous have been sealed and, as in 6:11, are counted with the number of those who should be included as martyrs.

7-2 The Sealing

Rev 7:2-3

> *I saw another angel ascend from the sunrise, having the seal of the living God. He cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was given to harm the earth and the sea,*
> *3 saying, "Don't harm the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, until we have sealed the bondservants of our God on their foreheads!"*

These two verses confirm that just as the angel did not destroy the firstborn of Egypt until the Israelites had placed the blood on the door frames of their houses, so the final destruction of the earth will not take place until after God's elect have been identified and sealed. In 6:11 we saw that the souls of the martyrs were to be patient until this sealing process was complete.

Why does the angel come up from the east? The wording is 'out of the rising of the sun', and may suggest the east as the source of light coming out of darkness. In Ezekiel 43:2 the Glory of God is seen to come from the east, and in Matthew 24:27 Christ likens His return to lightning coming from the east. Thus *from the east* suggests that the angel comes from heaven. The Holy Temple also faced east, as did the Garden of Eden. East is the direction of God.

We now turn our attention to the seal of the living God. Can we know what it is? Is it something visible like the lamb's blood on the doorposts? Or does it symbolise an attitude of mind and belief that God recognises in those who are his servants? We are told that this seal is placed on the forehead, but when we study its rival mark, the Mark of the Beast (13:16), we see it to be placed on the forehead *or* on the right hand. The inference is that while the righteous are saved by their attitude of mind – in other words their faith – the wicked are lost by their attitude of mind *and* by their works.

There are two passages that help us identify the seal. They are *Revelation 14:1* and *22:4*. Both these identify the seal of the living God as his Name; John says that God's servants will have His Name written on their foreheads. But what does it mean by His Name?

In Bible times names were given to represent a character. Thus Jacob, meaning 'deceiver', had his name changed to Israel meaning 'He will rule'. Abraham's name was changed from 'High Father' to 'Father of a multitude'. Thus God's Name also represents His Character.

The entire Bible is a revelation of God's character, and nowhere do we find it more clearly revealed than in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Yet it is not simply a matter of intellectual assent to the existence of Jesus that will seal the righteous, it is discipleship; and discipleship means servanthood. For this reason Jesus frequently stressed the importance of obedience in expressions such as, *"If you love me, keep my commandments"* (John 14:15). It is therefore not surprising that this passage refers to the sealed ones as servants, those who do the bidding of their Master.

This presents a conundrum for us: we see that the wicked are lost by their works, but the righteous are saved by their faith alone. Yet true faith is not complete without obedience. Does this mean then that salvation comes through obedience? Not at all! Salvation is still by grace through faith, but that faith is perfected by the fruits of obedience. Thus again we see that obedience is the fruit of salvation, not the means to it.

There is an interesting and powerful echo to this passage. It is found in Ezekiel 9:3-6: "*…and he called to the man clothed in linen, who had the writer's inkhorn by his side. 4 Yahweh said to him, "Go through the middle of the city, through the middle of Jerusalem, and set a mark on the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry over all the abominations that are done within it." 5 To the others he said in my hearing, "Go through the city after him, and strike. Don't let your eye spare, neither have pity. 6 Kill utterly the old man, the young man, the virgin, little children and women; but don't come near any man on whom is the mark. Begin at my sanctuary…"*

This is a significant passage, and relevant to our study. Firstly, it indicates to us something about those who are counted as God's servants; they grieve and lament for the abominations committed throughout the world. That the state of the world today is a cause for grief is beyond dispute; but while we readily lament the behaviour of terrorists, corrupt governments and paedophiles, we somehow fail to grieve over the moral decadence, the greed, and the lack of political will that so characterises our world today. Somehow we fail to see our world as God must see it – one in which the sports stadium has

replaced the church; in which the two institutions especially given by God to man at Creation, marriage and the Sabbath, have been nigh obliterated in our craving for the right to live as we wish.

Secondly, we are startled to note that the judgment begins at the sanctuary – with those who are seen to represent God and those who worship there. These are the first ones God destroys because they have misrepresented Him by using their religiosity to their own advantage. Again and again the message comes through; God does not see in the intellectual assent – the casual nod in the direction of heaven – qualification for eternity with Christ. He expects more from those who profess His name.

When we study Revelation 11 we shall have cause to look more closely at the sanctuary, for there God instructs that it be carefully measured.

7-3 The 144,000

Rev 7:4-8

> *I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred forty-four thousand, sealed out of every tribe of the children of Israel:*
> *5 of the tribe of Judah twelve thousand were sealed,*
> *of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand,*
> *of the tribe of Gad twelve thousand,*
> *6 of the tribe of Asher twelve thousand,*
> *of the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand,*
> *of the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand,*
> *7 of the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand,*
> *of the tribe of Levi twelve thousand,*
> *of the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand,*
> *8 of the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand,*
> *of the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand, and*
> *of the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand were sealed.*

The subject of the 144,000 can prove emotive; and of all the passages in the Book of Revelation, this has perhaps created the most discussion as to whether it is literal or symbolic. Some believe that only this exact number will be saved when Christ returns, and that their congregation

alone comprises that number. Others see it as symbolising all those who will finally make up God's kingdom.

Probably no argument set down here will settle the debate, but there are some aspects of this mysterious number that may help bring the reader to a better understanding of it.

The first point of interest is that the names of the tribes do not coincide exactly with the twelve tribes as normally listed in the Hebrew Scriptures. For example, the tribe of Dan is omitted, and the tribe of Levi is included. Therefore considerable difficulties are encountered if these are literal tribes. Why, for example, should exactly 12,000 be saved from each tribe except Dan from whom none is saved? Why should Joseph *and* his son Manasseh be included while Ephraim is not? These problems are resolved if we consider the reference to the sons of Israel as a spiritual one as did the Apostle Paul, for example, in Romans 9:6-8: *…for they are not all Israel that are of Israel. 7 Neither, because they are Abraham's offspring, are they all children. But, "your offspring will be accounted as from Isaac." 8 That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as heirs.*

Secondly, we have seen the seal itself to symbolise discipleship, or servanthood; obedience to the Word of God. Therefore, if the seal is a symbol there is no reason that the number of those sealed should be literal.

Finally, the 144,000 is mentioned also in Revelation 14:4 where a literal interpretation becomes quite awkward in that they are all required to be celibate males.

It is therefore more reasonable to see the 144,000 as a symbolic representation of the completeness of the number. Nobody will be forgotten; all who should be there will be there. In fact it is of greater importance to study the characteristics of the redeemed than their number, for these are the ones who will be able to stand in the great crisis described at the end of Chapter Six: *who shall be able to stand?* These are the ones who are loyal to their Master, the Lord Jesus Christ. They are pure and without deceit. They have no interest in idolatrous worship, and follow Jesus wherever He leads them. This is the true importance of this number. However, there is another possible explanation for this number that we shall explore in the following passage.

7-4 The Great Multitude

Rev 7: 9-12

> *After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude, which no man could count, out of every nation and of all tribes, peoples, and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, dressed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands.*
> *10 They cried with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation be to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"*
> *11 All the angels were standing around the throne, the elders, and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before his throne, and worshiped God,*
> *12 saying, "Amen! Blessing, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, honor, power, and might, be to our God forever and ever! Amen."*

Are there two groups of people who are saved? Are the 144,000 a special group of those who were either martyrs or in some other way closer to Christ than the majority of the saved?

The fact that the winds of strife were not to blow until the 144,000 had been sealed would suggest that they represent those who 'are alive and remain' (1Thess 4:16-17) when Christ returns. If that is so, then it is reasonable to assume that the great multitude therefore represents all those who have lived and died in the faith from the time of Adam until the time of the second coming. However we are told in verse 14 that these have also come out of great tribulation. For this reason some commentators have taken the two groups to be one and the same, with the 144,000 representing the righteous sealed prior to the tribulation and their being described as a great multitude after their redemption has taken place.

Another possibility is that the 144,000, coming from the 'twelve tribes', are spiritual Israelites – i.e. those who have been faithful believers, while the great multitude may be made up from those spiritual 'Gentiles' from all nations whom God, in His wisdom and mercy, has seen fit to welcome into His kingdom.

Some Biblical scholars have suggested that there may be a literary play occurring here. This is not the first time John is told to expect one thing and then sees another. We saw for example that in Revelation 5:5-6 John expected to see a Lion, but when he looked he saw a Lamb. In Revelation 17 he looks for a prostitute sitting on 'many waters', but when he sees her she is on a beast.

In this case John hears the number of those sealed, 144,000, but when he looks he sees a great number that cannot be counted. Therefore it is very possible that the 144,000 and the great multitude are in fact the same people. This is good news indeed, for the idea that heaven has room only for a set number of people, or that only a few will be saved at the Second Advent, is a most discouraging doctrine that is not supported by the words of Christ who said that *whoever* believed in Him would not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

7-5 The White Robes

Rev 7: 13-17

> *One of the elders answered, saying to me, "These who are arrayed in the white robes, who are they, and where did they come from?"*
> *14 I told him, "My lord, you know."*
> *He said to me, "These are those who came out of the great suffering. They washed their robes, and made them white in the Lamb's blood.*
> *15 Therefore they are before the throne of God, they serve him day and night in his temple. He who sits on the throne will spread his tabernacle over them.*
> *16 They will never be hungry or thirsty any more. The sun won't beat on them, nor any heat;*
> *17 for the Lamb who is in the middle of the throne shepherds them and leads them to springs of life-giving waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."*

This passage backs up the suggestion that the two groups are one and the same. The question refers to those who are wearing the white

robes – the great multitude. However, white robes are promised to all those who overcome sin; they are worn by the 24 elders, and are promised to those in Sardis who overcome. More than any other, this group of 144,000 has overcome and is worthy to wear white. The robes themselves were discussed in *3-1 Sardis.*

The chapter ends with a promise. After the redeemed of all the ages have come before the heavenly throne, the Lamb will lead them to fountains of living waters, to the beautiful river of life that was given to the first Adam so long ago. And then God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

But why would the redeemed be shedding tears? Perhaps this is a promise to those who have wept for the abominations they have observed in the world. They may also be weeping for the lost, among who are their own loved ones. We will see that there will come a time when the redeemed will understand why the lost *were* so, so that they and all of heaven may fully comprehend God's justice.

What is certain is that there will be nobody in heaven who will be unhappy there. One may wonder how anybody could be unhappy in heaven, but there are those who would not enjoy the culture of holiness and praise that exist there. It is while on this earth that we must develop the Christ-like characters that we will have in heaven. Those who love the things of the world will never find satisfaction in the purity of Christ's presence; like Lot's wife, they will be ever looking back.

Chapter 8

8-1 Silence, Trumpets, Incense, Earthquake

Rev 8:1-6

> *When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.*
> *2 I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them.*
> *3 Another angel came and stood over the altar, having a golden censer. Much incense was given to him, that he should add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne.*
> *4 The smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand.*
> *5 The angel took the censer, and he filled it with the fire of the altar, then threw it on the earth. Thunders, sounds, lightnings, and an earthquake followed.*
> *6 The seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.*

Chapters 8 to 10 bring us to what I consider to be the most difficult part of the entire book of Revelation. Reading the various commentators reveals a multitude of opinions and very little consensus.[49]

I do not profess to have any better light than any of these accomplished commentators whose education and knowledge far surpasses my own. I can only present what I see, even though you will need to measure it carefully against what others say.

I do not see Revelation 8:1 as the entirety of the seventh seal. I believe 8:1-6 describe John's third glimpse into the heaven where he sees a new activity in the heavenly Sanctuary that forms the backdrop to the seven trumpets. Therefore, I think the silence in heaven should be interpreted, not on its own, but as a part of the imagery of 8:1-6, which includes angels, trumpets, incense, thunder storms and an earthquake.

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[49] I could, and should, footnote the many available commentaries, but nowadays a search engine entry as simple as 'Revelation 8:1' can quickly place these commentaries together in a single website reducing months of work to a few hours. Daniel's guide sure got it right when he said knowledge shall increase at the time of the end.

The problem is that the other six sanctuary scenes open with a view into heaven and 8:1 does not. John only looks into heaven in 8:2. This leads some to isolate 8:1 from 8:2 and attach it to the events of Chapter 7. However, I think that what is taking place in heaven during the period of silence is what is described in 8:2-6. In other words, the angel with the censor is working in silence while he offers before the throne the millennia of sighs and cries of the saints who long for deliverance from so many wrongs. As the smoke ascends all of heaven stands in awed silence as God listens. Then, when all the prayers have been heard, the angel fills the censor with burning coals and cast it to the earth wherein dwell those who have persecuted, tortured and put to death the owners of those prayers, as though as a witness to their guilt. When the censor is thrown down, the earth is convulsed by the sounds of its condemnation, shouting and screaming, thunder and lightning, and the roar of a great earthquake. But the sound is on the earth, not in heaven, for only now do the celestial trumpeters prepare to break the silence in heaven.

There are other clues that we can study in order to make the picture clearer. As we have already discovered, we can turn to the Old Testament to learn about the New. We can look for passages that are alluded to in this enigmatic section of Revelation. Silence, trumpets, great noise, an earthquake; do these make any echoes? The seven trumpets are seven judgments to come upon selected areas of the earth? Are there any judgment scenes in the Hebrew Scriptures that contain the elements found in 8:1-6? The answer is yes, one; let's see if it can help us…

Abraham was dwelling in Canaan, among the Amorites, when God said to him, *"Know for a certainty that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs…for four hundred years…But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete"* (Genesis 15:13-16 NKJV)". We may marvel at the long-suffering of God in giving this corrupt nation another four hundred years of grace. Yet people say our God is an angry God who delights in destruction; if He were so, our cup of iniquity would have been full long ago.

Four hundred years later, the Amorites' cup of iniquity *was* full to the brim as the young nation of Israel stood at their door as God's implement of judgment. Their leader, Joshua, whose name is the Hebrew form of Jesus, stood at their head and instructed them on this their first act of judgment upon the Amorites. The next morning they

were to move in procession from their camp and march around Jericho once, and then return to camp. At the head of the procession would be seven priests, each carrying a ram's horn trumpet, a *shofar.* Behind them, priests would carry the Ark of the Covenant. All was to be done in silence; not a sound was be made by the people, only the blowing of the trumpets. For six days this was repeated, and then on the seventh day they marched around seven times. After the seventh circuit of Jericho the trumpeters gave a long blast on their shofars and Joshua's people gave a mighty shout. Then, amid the screams of Jericho's terror-stricken inhabitants, the walls of the city began to crumble as though a mighty earthquake had struck the land. Judgment upon the Amorites had begun. The Jericho silence lasted one week. The heavenly silence lasted half an hour. We have seen that in prophecy one day of prophetic time is always 360 days of real time. Hence it is simple maths to calculate that "about half an hour" is one week.

History repeats itself in the Bible; so much that happened in early times was a type of what would happen on a larger scale later, and stands as a teaching aid for those who will live later. Today we stand at the border of the heavenly Canaan with Jesus at our head to lead us in. The earth's cup of iniquity is full to the brim, and all we can say is, How long, O Lord, how long?" Already we see the earth groaning under the burden placed upon it. No wonder the voices of the seventh trumpet cry out, *"The nations were angry, and your wrath came, as did the time for the dead to be judged, and to give your bondservants the prophets, their reward, as well as to the saints, and those who fear your name, to the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth"* (Revelation 11:18). Very soon the trumpets will sound and the Lord will descend from heaven with a shout (1Thessalonians 4:13-18).

8-2 The First Trumpet

Rev 8:7

> *The first sounded, and there followed hail and fire, mixed with blood, and they were thrown to the earth. One third of the earth was burned up, and one third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up.*

The language of the first trumpet, with its hail, fire and blood, is strongly reminiscent of the seventh plague upon Egypt. These plagues were

judgments upon a people who rejected God and were under condemnation for it. “Who is the Lord that I should obey him?” was their demand (Exodus 5:2). Therefore, it is logical to associate the seven trumpets with judgment on God’s enemies.

Trumpets were also blown in Israel during the week leading up to the annual Day of Judgment, *Yom Kippur*, during which time the people were to search their hearts and repent of their sins. These sins were then symbolically placed upon the head of the scapegoat leaving Israel in a state of righteousness before God.

The reference to thirds of the earth suggests a progression in destruction. We saw in Revelation 6:8 a reference to fourths of the earth, now the damage is in thirds, and finally, in the seven last plagues of Chapter 16, which are very similar in order and in nature to the trumpets, the entire earth is damaged. However, it is only during the time of the last plagues that the earth comes to its final end. Therefore the trumpets do not describe final events, for they are only partial judgments, not total; they follow the course of earth’s history as did the churches and seals, albeit from the perspective of those to be judged.

This conclusion is also supported in the references to the expression, ‘the inhabitants of the earth’, which always refers to the unsaved. Thus in Matthew 24:30 we read that the ‘nations of the earth’ will mourn when they see Christ return. Likewise in Rev 6:10 the martyrs cry out, “How long…until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?” Again in Chapter 8:13, we find woes cried out for the inhabitants of the earth. The righteous, on the other hand, are always seen in relationship to heaven. For example, the two groups of Chapter 7 are seen in heaven, not on the earth, even though they are still living on earth at the time.

The first trumpet involves hail, fire and blood. These represent damage, pain, loss of life and property, and warfare. They come upon a third of the grass and trees. Grass and trees in prophecy symbolise God’s people dwelling in righteousness as in Psalm 1, Psalm 23 and many other places in the Scriptures. Thus the first trumpet is a judgment on those who have been God’s people, but whose unfaithfulness has led to the taking away of their righteousness. Specifically, the first trumpet is judgment upon Israel for its rejection of Christ and the persecution of His followers. This occurred in AD 70 when Rome besieged Jerusalem and destroyed it along with the Temple. With God judgment always begins at home. However, it did

not destroy the identity of the Jewish people even though they were forbidden to live in Jerusalem.

The first trumpet is also a response to the plaintive cry of 6:10, *"How long, Sovereign Lord, Holy and True, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?* (KJV)*"* At that time the saints were told to wait a little longer, until their number was complete. The trumpets are God's response to the evil of the world. The first trumpet was God's response to the evil committed by Israel during the days of the Ephesus Church and the first seal. The second trumpet will reveal God's judgment upon Rome during the time of the Smyrna Church, and the pattern will continue as for the seals and churches.

8-3 The Second Trumpet

Rev 8: 8- 9

> *The second angel sounded, and something like a great burning mountain was thrown into the sea. One third of the sea became blood,*
> *9 and one third of the living creatures which were in the sea died. One third of the ships were destroyed.*

The imagery here describes a collapsing mountain that falls upon the sea destroying many, but not all, sea creatures and ships. Sea, in prophecy, always represents people and populous areas (Rev 17:15). The sea becoming blood also reminds us of the first plague that God, through Moses, brought upon Egypt, but in this case, as with the first trumpet, blood represents warfare. Thus a third of the world's population is described as being in a state of war.

The second trumpet, in which the sea represents populace describes the downfall of the Roman Empire during the Arian wars during the 4th and 5th centuries. Names such as Alaric, Genseric, and Attila evoke images that well describe the carnage seen in Europe at this time. In fact Genseric the Vandal king's naval conquests of North Africa, and his sacking of Rome in 455 AD, have added the word 'vandalism' to our vocabulary.

8-4 The Third Trumpet

Rev 8: 10 - 11

> *The third angel sounded, and a great star fell from the sky, burning like a torch, and it fell on one third of the rivers, and on the springs of the waters.*
> *11 The name of the star is called "Wormwood." One third of the waters became wormwood. Many people died from the waters, because they were made bitter.*

It is the Old Testament that again helps clarify this seemingly obscure passage. We are told that a blazing star called 'Wormwood' falls from the sky to earth and pollutes a third of the world's fresh water. This is not the first time we have heard of a star falling from heaven to earth. In Isaiah 14:12 we learn of Lucifer (NIV, *Morning Star*) falling from heaven to earth because of his arrogance in attempting to assume the place of God. In Luke 10:18 Jesus sees Satan fall like lightning from heaven. In Revelation 12:7-9, Michael casts Satan out of heaven to the earth. These passages identify Mr. Wormwood as none other than Satan. But what about his name?

Wormwood is a bitter herb with the Latin name, *Artemesia absinthium.* It is used in small quantities to provide flavour, and is found in the wine known as *vermouth,* a name derived from the German *'wermut*', or 'wormwood'. It is Deuteronomy 29:18 that helps us solve the riddle of this name: *so that there may not be among you man, or woman, or family, or tribe, whose heart turns away today from the Lord our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations; and that there may not be among you a root bearing bitterness or wormwood* (NKJV).

It is a common literary technique among Bible writers, especially in the poetic writings of the Psalms and Proverbs, to use repetition of a thought, repeating the same idea in different language, and numerous examples of this may be found in the Scriptures. This passage likens to wormwood those who turn away from God and follow false gods, and this is exactly what Satan did during the dark ages as the simple truths of Scripture, the springs of water, became poisoned with Babylonian traditions and superstition.

One may ask if this is truly a judgment. But while the acceptance of unbiblical traditions was the choice of the church, the resulting darkness that came over Europe during those centuries, and the

spiritual and social effects of that darkness, was certainly a judgment even if self-inflicted.

God's judgments over the millennia have not usually been carried out in person by God; rather He has used natural means, another nation or a natural disaster, to bring about the judgment. The Assyrians, Babylonians, Romans and Vandals have all been God's unwitting instruments in times past. During the dark ages Satan himself, for over 1000 years, seems to have wielded the rod of oppression. Only the restitution of all things, and the opening of the scroll, will reveal how many died who drank this bitter water.

8-5 The Fourth Trumpet

Rev 8: 12

> *The fourth angel sounded, and one third of the sun was struck, and one third of the moon, and one third of the stars; so that one third of them would be darkened, and the day wouldn't shine for one third of it, and the night in the same way.*

The first trumpet affected the earth, trees, and grass. The second, the sea and marine creatures. The third affected the rivers, and now the fourth affects the sun, moon and stars leaving the earth in partial darkness.

The language of the trumpets, and of the bowls in Chapter 16, is not unlike the language of Creation. While the order is not exactly the reverse, there are enough similarities to bring our attention to the Genesis passage. For example, both mention the same components of the solar system, but while the Creation account moves from darkness to light, the trumpets work back towards the darkness. Thus we see in this passage a general trend towards the undoing of Creation. It is as though God is preparing the planet for the new earth that He will create when sin is finally eradicated.

The fourth trumpet particularly echoes the words of Joel 2:28-32 and the words of Christ in Matthew 24 where he quotes Joel. Both these passages reveal that in the last days there will be natural signs in the

heavens with the sun darkening and the moon turning to blood. Please refer back to Chapter *6 – 7 The Sixth Seal* for further detail.

If this understanding is correct then we see that the fourth trumpet brings us back to the time before the return of Christ, and that the judgment meted out here concerns the latter days. Given the environmental changes taking place in the world today, it does not seem unreasonable to understand the passage this way.

We need to bear in mind however, that we have heretofore treated the trumpets as symbolic rather than literal. To be consistent therefore, we need to ask ourselves if there is a symbolic meaning to the fourth trumpet. If there is, it no doubt refers to the spiritual darkness that exists on the earth during this time. "…*When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"* is the question Christ poignantly asks. Today we live in societies that for the main part make no reference to spiritual matters; church is never entered unless it has been turned into a restaurant, and worship seems to have moved from the church to the sports stadium. The Bible is completely unread by the majority, and evolution is the only widely accepted view of man's origin. There is no shortage of religion in today's world, but where is the spirituality?

8-6 The Three Woes

Rev 8: 13

> *I saw, and I heard an eagle, flying in mid heaven, saying with a loud voice, "Woe! Woe! Woe for those who dwell on the earth, because of the other voices of the trumpets of the three angels, who are yet to sound!"*

This verse introduces a pause in the narrative along with a special warning for what is about to occur on the earth. While the churches and seals took us through history in a chronological order, we have found the same periods covered by only four trumpets. The final three then may need to be looked at differently, for each has its own woe.

Chapter 9

9-1 The Fifth Trumpet

Rev 9:1-12

The fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from the sky which had fallen to the earth. The key to the pit of the abyss was given to him.
2 He opened the pit of the abyss, and smoke went up out of the pit, like the smoke from a burning furnace. The sun and the air were darkened because of the smoke from the pit.
3 Then out of the smoke came locusts on the earth, and power was given to them, as the scorpions of the earth have power.
4 They were told that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree, but only those people who don't have God's seal on their foreheads.
5 They were given power, not to kill them, but to torment them for five months. Their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a person.
6 In those days people will seek death, and will in no way find it. They will desire to die, and death will flee from them.
7 The shapes of the locusts were like horses prepared for war. On their heads were something like golden crowns, and their faces were like people's faces.
8 They had hair like women's hair, and their teeth were like those of lions.
9 They had breastplates, like breastplates of iron. The sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots, or of many horses rushing to war.
10 They have tails like those of scorpions, and stings. In their tails they have power to harm men for five months.
11 They have over them as king the angel of the abyss. His name in Hebrew is "Abaddon", but in Greek, he has the name "Apollyon".
12 The first woe is past. Behold, there are still two woes coming after this.

Now we come to the blowing of the fifth trumpet – the fifth *shofar*. These last three trumpets are far worse than the first four, for we are told, 'Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth' – that is those who do not believe – 'for the last three trumpets that are to sound.'

Of the entire book, this chapter is the hardest to understand. The symbolism is so strong, yet so obscure. How can we really know what this means? Do we need to know? We would love to try and understand these writings, and in our zeal, we can sometimes come up with nonsense. Jesus said we are given prophecy, not so much to tell the future, but so that when we see these things take place, then we shall understand the truth of what was said (John 16:4). Perhaps it is not until later that we will fully understand the details of these prophecies. In the meantime however, there are still some principles that will guide our understanding to recognise truth from error.

What do we find here? A falling angel, a bottomless pit, locusts coming out of the pit, five months of terror from the locusts, and finally a description of their leader. Can we make sense of this? Any echoes, anything familiar?

The Falling Angel
An angel falling from heaven to earth. Any echoes there? We saw a similar scene under the third trumpet (8:10), and in that case we concluded that the falling angel was Satan (See *8 – 5 The Third Trumpet*). This angel is given the key to the bottomless pit, and when he opens the pit, this revolting seething mass comes out like a scene from an Indiana Jones movie. What kind of angel would confront us with such a repulsive thing?

In verse 11 we read that this fearsome mass had a king over it, and he is called the angel of the bottomless pit. Thus we can conclude that the star of 9:1 is the same as the king of 9:11, and is also the same as the star of 8:10. His name is *Wormwood* – bitter poison, and *Abaddon* or *Apollyon,* Hebrew and Greek for *Destroyer*. So it is Satan himself who is the angel of the bottomless pit, Satan who releases this scourge upon the earth.

But wait a minute you say. That can't be right. What about Revelation 20:1-3 in which an angel also comes from heaven with a key to the bottomless pit? We know this cannot be Satan because he binds Satan and locks him in the pit. There are some differences between the star of 9:1 and the angel of 20:1; one falls from heaven while the other

comes of his own volition. One is given a key, while the other is the key's guardian. It is more likely that Satan, the prince of this world, has been such a despot that now he is to be interred by the King of Kings in the depths of his own dominion.

The Bottomless Pit

It is now time to look more closely at the pit. What is it? The Greek word in the Bible is *Abyss*. It has some interesting uses, especially Genesis 1:1-2 (Septuagint) where it is described as *the deep*. It describes the earth in its pre-creation state - a bottomless pit. And we have also seen that the trumpets appear to begin the process of 'uncreating' the earth and returning it to its abyss-like state prior to its recreation in Revelation 21. Therefore we can safely conclude that the bottomless pit is the earth. This harmonises with the sightings of Satan falling to earth, as seen by Jesus, and becoming its representative as described in the Book of Job, Chapter 1.

The Locusts

So, with this understanding of the pit and its king, what means the seething mass that writhes its way out of the pit and into the air like a toxic smoke, which, as it comes closer into John's view, becomes a plague of venomous locusts?

Again we turn to the Hebrew Scriptures for assistance. The first reference to locusts is Exodus 10:12-14, the eighth plague that God, through Moses, brought upon Egypt. Here God uses the locust plague to bring upon an unrepentant Egypt a punishment for their opposition to God and His people.

In Joel Chapters 1 and 2 we find an even more striking description of a locust plague. The locusts here are described as having 'the teeth of a lion, the fangs of a lioness'. In Joel 2:4-7 they are described as looking like horses that gallop in a cavalry charge across the land leaving it desolate behind them.

In that the imagery in Joel resembles that of Revelation 9; can we gain an understanding of the latter passage? Both OT passages refer to judgment; in Egypt's case against non-Jews, and in Joel's case against those Jews who have turned their back on God. Therefore, given that the trumpets describe judgments, it is consistent to understand the locust plague as a judgment of God against those who do not obey God.

There are three specifics given: they are not to hurt the earth or the environment, but only those people who are not sealed. They are empowered only to torment, not to kill. Finally they are given a lifespan of five months – approximately the normal lifespan of a well fed desert locust. There is another period of five months in Scripture. The number of days the waters of Noah's flood covered the earth. Interestingly that was also a judgment scene. Perhaps the locusts are to be seen as a sort of flood over the earth. Does all this give a clue as to any historical event?

If we follow the prophetic year principle, five months becomes 5 x 30 days, or 150 years. Is there any particular period of 150 years when people have had a particularly difficult time, or been particularly punished by God? Well, to be honest, there are probably quite a few.

Many Bible students from the time of the Reformation onwards, including John Wesley[50] and Sir Isaac Newton[51], have seen in the imagery of Revelation 9 the Moslem expansion culminating in the rise of the Ottoman Empire. It is worthy of note that the Moslem expansion, when viewed on a map, very closely approximates the areas of common locust invasion. With their flowing turbans, raised swords, and smoking firearms, one can't help wondering if this is what John saw in vision. Is it a reasonable explanation? Or is it a departure into the realm of speculation that we have tried to avoid in this book? Could this invasion of Christian lands have been a punishment from God for the apostasy that had taken place in the Christianised world during this time? These locusts were able to differentiate between those who were sealed and those who were not, and commanded not to hurt those who were sealed. Did the invading Moslems do that?

In this trumpet the locusts were instructed not to hurt the grass, the trees, nor any greenery. In the light of the first trumpet, where we saw that grass and lush vegetation symbolises the people of God, we can understand that the locusts were instructed not to hurt God's people. Those who have studied the Reformation closely have observed that those European nations that welcomed the reformed faith were not troubled by the Ottomans. Additionally, whenever the Emperor and the Pope attempted to eradicate the reformed faith, their attention was

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[50] *Ibid* Footnote 3.

[51] Newton *ibid* p.304,305.

drawn away by a new Ottoman invasion.[52] In this vein, the following trumpet gives an interesting challenge that may give us further pause for thought.

9-2 The Sixth Trumpet

Rev 9:13-19

> *The sixth angel sounded. I heard a voice from the horns of the golden altar which is before God,*
> *14 saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Free the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates!"*
> *15 The four angels were freed who had been prepared for that hour and day and month and year, so that they might kill one third of mankind.*
> *16 The number of the armies of the horsemen was two hundred million. I heard the number of them.*
> *17 Thus I saw the horses in the vision, and those who sat on them, having breastplates of fiery red, hyacinth blue, and sulfur yellow; and the horses' heads resembled lions' heads. Out of their mouths proceed fire, smoke, and sulfur.*
> *18 By these three plagues were one third of mankind killed: by the fire, the smoke, and the sulfur, which proceeded out of their mouths.*
> *19 For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails. For their tails are like serpents, and have heads, and with them they harm.*

The sixth *shofar* is similar to, and seems to be a continuation of, the fifth. The voice comes from the altar of sacrifice in front of the sanctuary, and orders the angel to release four angels, possibly the same four previously referred to in 7:1. The angels have at their disposal an army of 200 million which appear to have come straight out of an epic fantasy novel. This army slaughters a third of the population by the elements that come from their horse's mouths.

The four angels of Revelation 7:1 were global in that they held back the winds of strife throughout the world. These four angels are at the River

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[52] For example, "Every time [the Emperor Charles V] raised his sword to make an end of that detested thing (Lutheranism) the Turk unexpectedly presented himself…to forbid the blow" History of Protestantism, J Wylie, Book 12, Chapter 2.

Euphrates which suggests a more local application. However, they are bound there rather than doing their work there. In that Babylon is on the Euphrates, and Babylon is the city that symbolically headquarters of all that opposes God, maybe these are still global, for it appears that what comes out of the mouths of the horses destroys a third of the world's population. This weird army, its HQ presumably in Babylon, spreads across the world like a locust invasion, resulting in the sixth plague.

Because this is obviously symbolic language, it is very likely that this army represented some human instrumentality that God used to bring about this destruction. If so the idea of God using human instrumentalities is not unusual. For throughout the history of Israel, God used the nations such as Assyria, Babylon, the Moabites, the Ammonites and others to punish Israel. For example, in Habakkuk 1:6-11, we read that God is "raising up the Chaldeans…to possess homes that are not theirs". However, while God used these nations to judge Judah, He does not enjoy administering hard justice, and also punishes those nations for the enjoyment they seem to derive from administering their cruel judgments. This is seen in the book of Obadiah where God punishes the Edomites for standing by, and even joining in, while foreigners ransacked Jerusalem (See Obadiah v. 11-14).

Those who have seen a Moslem invasion in the fifth trumpet, see it even more strongly in the sixth. If the tear-day principle is applied to this prophecy, this rather specific time period of an hour, a day, a month, and a year, becomes 391 years and fifteen days. Thus the total time period for the fifth and sixth trumpets is 150 years plus 391 years plus fifteen days, which seems a highly improbable length of time to which any historical significance might be attached. However, there were, during the nineteenth century, those who saw an Islamic judgment in these trumpets, and presented an interesting argument to defend their position, a defence that, despite its problems, is worthy of inclusion because of its powerful influence upon the thinking of Bible students of that era.

The first victory of the ascending Ottoman Empire occurred in July 27, 1299 at the Battle of Bapheum. This power was finally consolidated around 1449 (150 years later) when the Turkish Sultan Murad II became recognised as the supreme ruler of the Empire.

In June 1839 (390 years later) Egypt rebelled against Turkey and defeated it, capturing its entire Navy. This caused instability throughout the whole Middle East that affected Europe, which had interests in the

region. Thus Austria, Britain, Russia, France and Germany, sat around a table in London, and on July 15, 1840, drew up the Convention of London. This Convention, in essence, proposed that Egypt return Turkey's Navy, and in return that Turkey surrender the bulk of her empire. Should the two nations not agree to this, then Europe would take matters into its own hands. On August 11, 1840 this ultimatum was delivered and accepted, and from this day on the Ottoman Empire lost its independence, thus paving the way for the Europeans, particularly the British to rule the Middle East. If one calculates the interval between July 27, 1299 and August 11, 1840, the length of time is 541 years and 15 days.

It is fair to observe though that this calculation has its opponents. For example, the beginning date is contested, some claiming it should be July 27, 1301. Additionally, the ultimatum of August 11, 1840, while delivered on that date, was not acceptable to Turkey. Thus this date cannot be relied upon as the end of the Ottoman Empire. In fact it only gradually declined, not totally losing its influence until 1917. Opponents will also point out that there was a 10-day change in the calendar during the days of Pope Gregory.

The importance of this interpretation lies, not in its accuracy, but in its influence upon the thinking of those expecting the return of Christ during the 1840s. [53] The time period is virtually meaningless in a preterist context, i.e. literal time, but in the historicist context places the sixth trumpet squarely in the 'time of the end'.

9-3 The Sixth Trumpet - continued

Rev 9:20-21

> *The rest of mankind, who were not killed with these plagues, didn't repent of the works of their hands, that they wouldn't worship demons, and the idols of gold, and of silver, and of brass, and of stone, and of wood; which can't see, hear, or walk.*
> *[21] They didn't repent of their murders, their sorceries, their sexual immorality, or their thefts.*

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[53] Based on this interpretation, a Methodist preacher, Josiah Litch, in 1838, predicted that the Turkish Ottoman Empire would come to an end on August 11, 1840.

As appealing as the above interpretation is, there is no doubt that difficulties exist. For example, does this period accurately describe the effect of the Ottoman Empire upon Europe? Was the Moslem invasion the terror that the Woes predict? Commentators of earlier eras by necessity place these two trumpets in an earlier history. John Wesley, a preacher rather than a theologian, believed they referred to the earliest years of Islam during the days of Mohammed and his successor Abu Bakr in their conflicts against the Jews[54].

Whatever the truth of this passage, perhaps the most important message for us here is that these plagues were insufficient to turn man away from his rebellion against God. We do not know for sure who the 'rest of mankind' refers to, but one cannot help wondering if it is us. For this generation, more than any other in the history of the world (except perhaps for the days of Noah), has seen such widespread rejection of the Bible and its message of a God who is Creator, Lawgiver, and Judge. Even large numbers of those who profess Jesus Christ stop short of accepting Him as a literal Creator, and see obedience to His holy law as legalism. Judgment is seen by many Christians as out of character for a loving Saviour.

[54] Wesley refers to them as 'Persians'.

Chapter 10

10-1 Another Mighty Angel

Rev 10:1-3

> *I saw a mighty angel coming down out of the sky, clothed with a cloud. A rainbow was on his head. His face was like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire.*
> *2 He had in his hand a little open book. He set his right foot on the sea, and his left on the land.*
> *3 He cried with a loud voice, as a lion roars. When he cried, the seven thunders uttered their voices.*

Chapter 10 presents an entirely new scene, but which is still set within the sixth Trumpet. The scene involves an Angel who offers John a scroll, and a message that John hears, but which he is forbidden to write down.

The identity of the angel is not difficult to know as the description matches those of Revelation 1:13-16 and 4:3, Ezekiel 1:26-28, Matthew 17:2, and Daniel 10:6. This is Christ Himself. It could be argued that because this Angel, in verse 6, swears by 'him who lives forever…' that he cannot be Christ. However, as we see in Hebrews 6:13, God swears by Himself because there is none other greater to swear by.

The little book, or scroll, is probably not that of Chapter 4 for reasons we looked at in that chapter. It is open, in contrast to the former, which was sealed closed and probably not able to be opened until after the seventh trumpet sounds.

The fact that Christ's feet are planted one on the sea, and one on the land suggest not only the world-wide intent of the message in the scroll, but also His ownership of the planet.

The passage alludes to a scene in Daniel 12:5-9 in which the prophet sees two men, one on each river bank, and a third man above the river. He is then told that the book (the book of Daniel) is to be sealed until the time of the end, i.e. until the 3 ½ times (1260 years) are complete. We will look further into this allusion in the following section.

10-2 The Sealed Words

Rev 10:4-7

> *When the seven thunders sounded, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from the sky saying, "Seal up the things which the seven thunders said, and don't write them."*
> *5 The angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land lifted up his right hand to the sky,*
> *6 and swore by him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and the things that are in it, the earth and the things that are in it, and the sea and the things that are in it, that there will no longer be delay,*
> *7 but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then the mystery of God is finished, as he declared to his servants, the prophets.*

The instruction to *"seal up what the things which the seven thunders said"* rings a bell; it echoes a passage in Daniel 12:4 "*But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end. Many will run back and forth, and knowledge will be increased."*

We have already been brought in contact with this passage in Chapter *3-1 Sardis*. There we learned that Daniel's book was to be sealed up until the time of the end. In our text under consideration we also find John told to seal up what he hears. No doubt John is given the same instruction because, like Daniel's book, it was not intended for his day, but for the time of the end.

There are some similarities between Revelation 10 and Daniel 12 that give us some important clues as to the identity of the little scroll. Let's list them:

1. The angel who talks to Daniel (verse 5) is described in Daniel 10:6 as a being of intense glory; likewise the one who talks to John in verse 1 above. They are both Christ.

2. Daniel's angel is above the waters of a river while John's angel is astride land and sea.

3. Both angels lift up their hand and solemnly swear on oath concerning time. Daniel's that there shall be 3 ½ times (1260 years) and then shall

the end come, and John's that time shall be no more. In other words, in John's vision the 1260 years have ended.

4. Daniel was told (Daniel 12:4) that at the time of the end many would run to and fro and that knowledge would increase. Popular theology would relate this to modern-day travel and scientific acumen. However, in context it refers to the fact that with the coming of 'the time of the end' after 1260 years, understanding of the Book of Daniel would come to light and many would 'run to and fro' preaching the end-time message to the world.

The conclusion is elementary; Daniel was told to seal the book because it pertained to the time of the end. Now John sees an open book in a vision of the time of the end. In other words they are both the same book. The little scroll of Revelation 10 is the Book of Daniel.

This conclusion is further attested to in that from this point on the language of Daniel becomes more pronounced in Revelation, especially with reference to the 1260 days or 42 months (see 11:2 for example),

The expression 'time no longer' also implies that there will be no more time prophecies. In section *3-2 Philadelphia*, we looked at the time prophecy of the 2300 days and saw than in a historicist setting the period ended in the 1840s when the sanctuary was to be cleansed. This is the last and longest time prophecy, and after it come no more.

One further observation needs to be made about this passage: Is its reference to the Creatorship of God incidental? Or was it intentional on God's part to remind a world that accepts only evolution as an adequate explanation of our origins that He is in fact our Creator. This topic has already been addressed under *3-3 Laodicea*, but will again be seen to raise its head, as though an issue that Jesus does not wish to let slip by.

10-3 The Little Scroll

Rev 10:8-11

> *The voice which I heard from heaven, again speaking with me, said, "Go, take the book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the land."*

> *9 I went to the angel, telling him to give me the little book.*
> *He said to me, "Take it, and eat it. It will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey."*
> *10 I took the little book out of the angel's hand, and ate it. It was as sweet as honey in my mouth. When I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter.*
> *11 They told me, "You must prophesy again over many peoples, nations, languages, and kings."*

The language of these verses suggests that John experienced a bitter disappointment. He anticipated something wonderful, but instead was told he still had work to do. It is as though with the eating of the scroll he was experiencing heaven, but instead it turned into the bitterness of being told, "Not yet".

The preterist interpreter would look for an event in John's own life to explain this passage; perhaps the fact that he was not killed, but consigned to a penal colony where he was to write his gospel, epistles and Revelation so that many peoples, nations, languages and kings would read them.

From the historicist perspective, the passage sits squarely in the time of the end and strongly suggests an expectation as to the imminent return of Christ, only to be told that there is still a big work to be done. This scenario well describes the experience of those who, in the mid nineteenth century, anticipated the imminent return of their Lord (see *3-2 Philadelphia*). For them nothing was sweeter than the thought that Christ would return any day; nothing was more bitter than that He did not. Their faith in this event was such that most of them made no effort to harvest their crops in 1844, and were thus exposed not only to cruel ridicule, but were in dire straits financially. Somehow they now had to preach again a soon coming Christ to a scornful audience of those to whom they were a laughing stock. Still today their spiritual descendants are viewed with distrust by the Christian world.[55]

In Matthew 24 Christ seems to be anticipating such an event, for in describing the 'end of the world', He says in verse 14, *This Good News of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world for a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.* Those who anticipated the

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[55] See for example: *Christianity Today, The King is Coming- Eventually,* Elesha Coffman, 10/18/2002.

soon return of Christ had not understood that the entire world had to hear the Gospel before Christ would return.

The second and third chapters of Ezekiel are not without importance in understanding this passage; for there is a strong resemblance between John's experience and Ezekiel's. Ezekiel is given a most unpopular message of warning and woe to take to Israel written on a scroll that he also must eat. He too experiences the sweetness of the message as he eats the scroll, and also the bitter refusal of its hearers to respond to it. God informs Ezekiel that had he been sent to the nations of the world, they would have listened. Does John's message have the same result? He *is* sent to the whole world. Yet it was to his own people that Ezekiel was sent and he was so overwhelmed by the task ahead of him that for seven days he sat among them in fearful silence. After an idle and timid week God reminded Ezekiel that if he did not warn the people, they would die in their sins, and Ezekiel would be held accountable for their deaths.

Perhaps there is a message for Christian believers here. If we have a message to deliver, shall we hesitate to deliver it? Yet how can the Gospel, a message of good news, become bitter in the belly? It is true that the Gospel is a message of hope – the gift of God's love and forgiveness. Yet, there are aspects of it that require a commitment greater than many are willing to make. There is no doubt that the message of the last day, and of the return of Christ, is not one that is universally well received. Jesus likened the last days to those of Noah, the preacher of righteousness, whose message was faithfully given for 120 years amid ridicule, and apparently without one convert.

The Bible student who understands the New Testament fulfilment of the Hebrew Sanctuary festivals, i.e. that the Passover looked to Christ's crucifixion, the Firstfruits to His resurrection, and the Feast of Weeks to Pentecost, will also see in the Festival of Trumpets the time of warning of the coming judgment at *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement.

Thus God's final message to the world is a message of warning that judgment is soon to take place, for this is the great and terrible day of the Lord – wonderful news for the faithful, but sheer terror for the faithless. Malachi prophesied that Elijah would return at this time, and Elijah's message was one of repentance, not of smooth words. True, John the Baptist was an Elijah come to prepare the way of the coming Messiah, but will Christ come as King of Kings without first sending his messenger to prepare the way? Never has He intervened in the affairs

of this world without first sending a prophet to warn the people; Noah, Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah, and John the Baptist were all sent to warn the people of God's intervention in their affairs. Thus will it be when He comes again as the rightful King of this planet. Who is this latter-day Elijah that God sends in the last days? This question will be explored further in Chapter 14-2.

Chapter 11

11-1 The Temple Measured

Rev 11:1-2

> *A reed like a rod was given to me. Someone said, "Rise, and measure God's temple, and the altar, and those who worship in it.*
> *2 Leave out the court which is outside of the temple, and don't measure it, for it has been given to the nations. They will tread the holy city under foot for forty-two months.*

After being told that there is still a great work of preaching to do, John is then given an instruction that seems totally unrelated; to measure the temple and its worshippers, as well as the altar that stands between the temple building and the worshippers in the inner court.

A brief description of the temple in Jerusalem will help clarify this passage: In the temple proper were two rooms, the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. The latter, containing the Ark of the Covenant, was accessible only through the Holy Place. The priest on daily duty officiated only in the Holy Place. But once per year at *Yom Kippur*, or the Day of Atonement, the High Priest would enter the Most Holy Place, with blood, to atone for the sins of Israel.

Outside the temple, just in front of its entrance, stood the Altar of Sacrifice upon which the officiating priest would offer all the animal sacrifices. Next in proximity to the temple building, to the east of it, was the Court of the Priests that could be entered only by the priesthood. Beyond this was the Court of the Israelites accessible to all Jewish males; then finally, down a series of steps, was the Court of Women. Surrounding all of this inner court was a wall with nine gates through which no Gentile could pass without putting his life seriously at risk. The very large area surrounding the inner court was known as the Court of the Gentiles.

By the time John wrote the Book of Revelation, the temple in Jerusalem was possibly already destroyed, so it may not have been this one that John saw. Given the symbolism of this book, and given that the Christian Church is a spiritual Israel, it is probable that this temple

represents the church of Christ, and that its measurement represents God's scrutiny of it.

John is told specifically not to measure the Outer Court, the Court of the Gentiles, for they are not the ones under investigation. They have been given a time period of forty-two months to 'trample the holy city underfoot', after which time God will judge them. For an explanation of the forty-two months, see *3-1 Sardis.*

In this chapter we need to look at this uncomfortable concept of the 'measurement' of the saints, and as we do so we shall see that it is actually the most wonderful news possible for those who trust and obey Jesus Christ. But first, we must note the strong allusions this passage makes to two Old Testament passages.

The first is Ezekiel 40:1 – 48:35, which is too long to quote here, and gives a very detailed description of the restored temple and its services. Its dimensions are very different from those of Solomon's Temple, now in ruins, and very different from the temple the Jews built after the Babylonian captivity. Therefore it seems to be a heavenly, or figurative, temple rather than an earthly, or literal, one.

A briefer passage in Zechariah 2:1-13 reveals a man commissioned by heaven to measure Jerusalem. This act of measuring becomes a promise that one day Jerusalem will again be inhabited.

Both these passages, given at a time when the Jewish nation was captive in Babylon, suggest a restoration to a time when God's people will again worship Him without fear of enemies. Therefore, the passage in Revelation 11 is an assurance to God's people that through the dark and frightening end-times God will set up a place – a heavenly Jerusalem – where His people will worship in Spirit and Truth.

That God should examine His church may seem an unnecessary and unwelcome thing to do, for surely God already knows who are His. Therefore why the measurement? We have seen that this is an 'end time' passage when Christ's return is imminent. Therefore, is it necessary that God will want to scrutinise, or investigate, those who are His, not for His own sake, but for the sake of all beings, both fallen and unfallen, so that *every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father?*[56] The Apostle Paul told the Corinthian

[56] Philippians 2:11

believers that they would some day judge angels[57]; to do this they must have behind the scenes knowledge of the conflict between good and evil.

In instructing John to measure the Temple and the Altar, God is also turning the spotlight upon Himself and upon Christ's sacrifice so that their justice might also be examined. Since the entrance of sin, God's love has been misinterpreted and misrepresented, and His perfect character maligned. For millennia Satan has endeavoured to present God as a stern judge who delights in punishing sinners. Today religious fanatics terrorise the world in the name of God in the mistaken belief that they do Him a good service. This is the work of Satan.

In the same way the faithful have been ridiculed, tormented, tortured and martyred by the millions for their faith. Humble men and women who wished no more than to worship God according to the dictates of conscience, have been labelled as heretics, witches and Satanists. *How long O Lord,* they cry, *until you judge and avenge our blood upon those who dwell on the earth?*[58] Perhaps this then is the reason for the investigation; not so that God can know who are His, but so that the entire universe can see the justice of what He does.

God will soon judge those that dwell on the earth, but as a part of that judgment, the righteous must also be vindicated. The unsaved will not receive their wages without finally being convicted of the righteousness of the saved. A passage in the Book of Daniel 7:9-10, 22 is noteworthy: *I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened...and judgment was given to the saints of the most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom* (KJV).

The reader may recognise the description given of the Almighty. If so it is because He is the One described in Revelation 1:12-20. Our Judge

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[57] 1 Corinthians 6:3

[58] Revelation 6:10

is none other than Jesus Himself! Not only is He our Advocate[59], but wonder of wonders, He is also our Judge. With a legal team like that on our side we need have no fear of the judgment; for when your defence attorney is also your judge you need have no fear of the ruling.

When judgment is made in favour of the saints, they are found not guilty of the allegations made by Satan the Accuser. Thus when Christ instructs John to measure the Temple, the Altar and the worshippers, He is doing so, not to see what is wrong with them, but in order to vindicate them, and that is good news indeed.

11-2 The Two Witnesses

Rev 11:3-6

> *I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred sixty days, clothed in sackcloth."*
> *4 These are the two olive trees and the two lamp stands, standing before the Lord of the earth.*
> *5 If anyone desires to harm them, fire proceeds out of their mouth and devours their enemies. If anyone desires to harm them, he must be killed in this way.*
> *6 These have the power to shut up the sky, that it may not rain during the days of their prophecy. They have power over the waters, to turn them into blood, and to strike the earth with every plague, as often as they desire.*

This passage, like so many in Scripture, reveals its secrets only to those who are willing to search for the key. For the same reason Jesus spoke in parables He also speaks in riddles. Like a detective mystery, the reader must take the clues given, and from them deduce what Jesus wants us to know. As with the fictional detectives, we are given several clues as to the identity of the two witnesses. They are as follows:

1. They prophecy for 1260 days, a time period we now know to be 1260 years, and is the same period as the 42 months given to the Gentiles (see *3-1 Sardis*).

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[59] 1 John 2:1

2. They prophecy dressed in sackcloth, the garb of mourning and humility. Their work is to be done in a time of sorrow and difficulty.

3. They are two olive trees, an allusion to Zechariah 4 in which the prophet sees in vision a seven-branched candlestick, or menorah, flanked by two olive trees. Above the menorah is a bowl that collects oil from the two trees and channels it to the seven lamps. In the way oil is the fuel for the lamps, so, Zechariah is told, God's work is accomplished through the Holy Spirit. *Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts* (v. 6). The seven lamps represent the omniscience of God, and the two trees, we are told, are God's two anointed ones that stand by Him, or serve Him, continually.

4. They have power to prevent rain from falling on the earth. This could well allude to Elijah, during whose ministry it did not rain for a literal 1260 days[60]. Rain in this instance would symbolise the Holy Spirit as it does in James 5:17.

5. They have the power to bring fire from their mouths to strike down their enemies. This also alludes to Elijah who brought fire down upon his enemies (see 2 Kings 1).

6. They have power to turn water into blood. Here is an allusion to Moses who turned the waters of the Nile into blood in seeking Israel's departure from Egypt.

7. They have power to bring plagues upon the earth. This also alludes to Moses who brought a total of ten plagues upon an unrepentant Egypt.

The above seven points give us direction in seeking the identity and ministry of the two witnesses. Firstly, we can note that it was also Moses and Elijah who stood by Christ at the Transfiguration (Luke 9:28-36). Therefore, in a very real sense the two witnesses are Moses and Elijah themselves, or are a phenomenon symbolised by Moses and Elijah. In that the two witnesses are Christian era prophets, and that they prophesy for 1260 years dressed in sackcloth, we should perhaps look at what Moses and Elijah stand for in order to understand better their identity.

[60] see Luke 4:25 and James 5:17.

Moses was to the Israelites, not only their deliverer, but their lawgiver, and may be seen here to represent The *Torah*, or the Law. Elijah, a prophet, was commissioned to bring the people back to the Scriptures through revival and repentance. Thus he may be seen here to represent the Word of God through the prophets. Thus, when Christ referred to the Scriptures as *the law and the prophets* (Matthew 7:12), He was making reference to Moses and Elijah. For this reason, it has been suggested that the two witnesses are the Holy Scriptures. In the Christian dispensation perhaps these two witnesses could be seen as the Old and New Testaments, the Old Testament representing the law and the prophets, and the New, the Gospel. In truth none of God's servants has more faithfully stood by Him over the centuries than has the Bible. No other witness has come under Satan's attack as the Scriptures have done. During the Dark Ages, they were read only at the peril of one's life; smuggled from place to place by faithful men and women who sewed them into the hems of their garments to avoid detection. Today they are scorned by the 'enlightened' as myth and legend.

Yet, as the oil from the olive trees enabled the lamps to provide light, so the Scriptures enable the the Holy Spirit to shed the Light of the Gospel to the world. *"Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light for my path" (Psalm 119:105).* It is the Scriptures that have had the power to bring true enlightenment to the world. No other force exists that can change lives as can the Scriptures. It was the Scriptures that Martin Luther found chained to a monastery wall that brought about the Reformation; that when translated into the vernacular brought religious and political freedom to the nations; that have brought life and hope to millions in spiritual darkness. Is it a coincidence that those nations that based their national governance and societal values upon the Bible, are the most stable and prosperous today? Over the centuries none other has stood by God as have these two faithful servants. Truly they have been the channels through which the oil of God's Spirit has flowed into the hearts of man. What does it mean for the world that those very nations are, in this age, enacting legislations that oppose the instruction of these two witnesses?

11-3 The Death of the Witnesses

Rev 11:7-10

> *When they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up out of the abyss will make war with them, and overcome them, and kill them.*
> *8 Their dead bodies will be in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.*
> *9 From among the peoples, tribes, languages, and nations, people will look at their dead bodies for three and a half days, and will not allow their dead bodies to be laid in a tomb.*
> *10 Those who dwell on the earth rejoice over them, and they will be glad. They will give gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.*

We saw in *3-1 Sardis*, and *3-2 Philadelphia,* that the 1260 days ended with the close of the 18th Century, at which time the Scriptures were to come out of 'mourning', and begin a period of general acceptance with the dawning of the era of Missionary and Bible Societies. Before this occurred however, the two witnesses were to pay the ultimate price for their witness; they were to be put to death by the beast from the bottomless pit.

This passage provides our first reference to a beast, and the second to a bottomless pit. In Chapter 4:6 we read of four beasts before the throne, but the Greek word used there, *zoa,* is better translated as 'living creatures' as given in the NIV. The word used in this passage is *therion*, meaning a wild animal.

In Chapter 9:11 we learned that the angel of the bottomless pit, Abaddon, or Apollyon, was none other than Satan. Therefore it is safe to assume that this beast is Satan who is responsible for the death of the witnesses at the end of the 1260 years. If the two witnesses are the Old and New Testaments we would expect to see a time at the end of the 1260 years when Satan would launch an attack upon them that would see them effectively put to death, at least for a period of time.

The passage also says that the bodies of the two witnesses would lie in the street of the great city Sodom and Egypt. Both these cities were

renowned for their rejection of the God of Creation. *"Who is the LORD that I should listen to Him?"* was the question of Pharaoh to Moses. Yet we are told that this is the city in which our Lord was crucified. Does this mean then, that Sodom and Egypt symbolise Jerusalem? Possibly, but in Hebrews 6:4-5 we read that those who have been enlightened by the Gospel, and who then reject it, crucify Christ afresh. Perhaps then, rather than try to explain Sodom and Egypt as types of Jerusalem, it would be better to see the idolatry of this Sodom and Egypt as crucifying Christ once again.

When, we may ask, have the Scriptures ever been eliminated, even if only for a short period of time? There have certainly been those at times and places throughout history who have sought to purge society of the Scriptures. Regimes and dictatorships have never ceased to try, but always, even in the Soviet Union, there were untold numbers of faithful believers upholding the Word of God.

Given the timing of this passage, and the context of the historical interpretation of Revelation, we might expect to find some fulfilment of this passage at the end of the 1260 years or toward the end of the 18th Century. Can we? Verse 11 of this chapter reveals that Satan could destroy the Scriptures only for a 3½-year period, after which they would be raised triumphant. This time frame suggests a possible answer to the question. For the situation in France at the end of the 18th Century provides a solution. To understand why it could refer to France, let us take a very brief look at the history of post-Reformation Christianity in that country.

Of the countries in Europe that were influenced by the Reformation, France is one of those that most bitterly opposed it. Initially the Reformation was received in France as in other Western European nations and by 1572 there were estimated to be about 400,000 Protestants, or Huguenots as they were known there, in France. However, severe opposition was brought to bear, especially from neighbouring Spain, and in August 1572, early in the morning of St. Bartholomew's day, a church bell tolled the signal to a countrywide massacre of Huguenots. It is estimated that between 30,000 and 40,000 Protestants died that day. No other country treated Protestants as did France.

In the decades to follow, under the supposed protection of the Edict of Nantes, Huguenot numbers grew to an estimated two million, but in October 1685 they were declared by King Louis XIV to be outlaws, and

were bitterly persecuted. During the period between 1685 and the beginning of the French Revolution of 1789 hundreds of thousands of Huguenots slipped out of France and resettled in other, more hospitable, countries.

Yet the departure of so many Protestants led to no great boon for the established church, for as the Protestant threat subsided, the Enlightenment, and the rise in the popularity of Deism, provided an even greater threat. Through the influence of notable men such as Jean Jacques Rousseau, Francois Voltaire, and the American expatriate Thomas Paine, a new philosophy developed in France, one that elevated Reason above religion. This, together with the uprising by the people against the ruling classes, led France into the horrors of the French Revolution. One cannot help but wonder if the French Revolution would have occurred at all if such a large number of Huguenots had not been massacred or forced to leave France.[61]

Whilst it is true that one of the purposes of the Revolution was to establish freedom of religion, or the freedom to have no religion, in reality Christianity became one of the chief targets for an uneducated and uncontrolled mob. As they vandalised the nation's churches, and killed the priests, the Revolution's leaders replaced the Christian calendar with one that abandoned all religious holidays and established a ten-day week. Then, on November 10, 1793 – or on the second Decade day of Foggy month, to use its revolutionary identification – a young woman was draped in the revolutionary colours of red, white and blue, and worshipped as Goddess Reason in none other place than Notre Dame Cathedral.

The Revolution in fact continued for only a few years, for such a movement can never be long sustained. Although it is difficult to pinpoint exact events that bookend a 3 1/2 year period in which the Bible lay 'dead', the period between November 1793 and February 1798, when Napoleon sent General Berthier to capture Rome, saw of period of 'dechristianisation' of France. These years saw the burning of Bibles, persecution of Christians both Catholic and Protestant, and witnessed the revelry of the people as they celebrated the goddess Reason in fulfilment of John's words over the death of the Two Witnesses that *they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry.*

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[61] The causes of the French Revolution are complex and the subject of greater discussion than can be given justice to here.

As we studied in *3-1 Sardis,* it was France that had given the Church its power in AD 538, and now France that took it away again at the end of the 3 1/2 prophetic years in 1798.

11-4 The Witnesses Raised

Rev 11:11-14

> *After the three and a half days, the breath of life from God entered into them, and they stood on their feet. Great fear fell on those who saw them.*
> *12 I heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here!" They went up into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies saw them.*
> *13 In that day there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified, and gave glory to the God of heaven.*
> *14 The second woe is past. Behold, the third woe comes quickly.*

Just as Elijah's famine lasted 3½ years, so there was to be a spiritual super-famine for the 3½ years that the Scriptures lay mortally wounded. But after that time they were to arise and, in the full view of their enemies, ascend to heaven in a cloud.

It is significant therefore that both Moses and Elijah ascended to heaven, albeit not in front of their enemies. The translation of Elijah is a well-known story found in 2 Kings 2. That Moses should be seen to ascend to heaven is less evident from the Scriptures. We are told that Moses died on Mount Nebo, and that his grave was never found. Jude 9 however, provides the amazing information that Satan challenged Michael the Archangel for the body of Moses. Satan claimed the body of Moses as his own, for he is the rightful owner of death. But Michael claimed Moses for heaven in the assurance that He would one day be raised as the firstfruits of those who sleep in the dust that would entitle Moses a place in heaven. When Moses later appeared with Elijah at the Transfiguration of Christ, his presence must have been a great encouragement to the Son of Man who yet had to face the horrors of Gethsemane and Calvary.

So just as Moses and Elijah, God's faithful witnesses, were taken up to eternal life, so the Scriptures were to arise, never again to see death. After the demise of the First French Republic in 1801, there occurred around the world a resurgence of interest in the Scriptures. As already described in *3-2 Philadelphia*, the world entered a new era of evangelism such as never had been seen since apostolic days.

While France had been persecuting its 'heretics', their counterparts in England and America had been quietly laying the foundation for a Christianity not before seen in Europe. Men like John and Charles Wesley and George Whitfield had been, during the mid 18th Century, sowing Gospel seeds that were now ready for the harvest. At this time sprang the many Christian movements that have shaped the modern world since that time. Some significant dates may be noted here: 1792 Founding of the Baptist Missionary Society, 1795 the birth of the London Missionary Society, 1803 the establishment of The Sunday School Union, 1810 the formation of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. In 1804 the British and Foreign Bible Society was founded after a 16-year old Welsh girl, Mari Jones, walked 25 miles in order to buy a Bible with money she had taken six years to save up. Through these institutions Christianity has spread from one continent to another with unstoppable energy. Today the Gospel is preached via satellite, short-wave radio and God-pod, into the deepest reaches of the earth in every language known to man. "Then", Jesus said, "The end shall come".[62]

We are now told that an earthquake destroys a tenth of the city and kills seven thousand people. These references are better seen as symbolic rather than literal. It is probable that the earthquake represents the upheaval that took place at this time in France, and may well represent the Revolution itself. The city is not Paris, but the city that features throughout the Book of Revelation as the Capital of the 'peoples of the earth", namely Babylon. In that only a tenth of it is affected by the earthquake, it is likely that this tenth part is France, perhaps being one of the toes in Nebuchadnezzar's image of Daniel Chapter 2 (See *3-1 Sardis*).

With this section we arrive at the end of the sixth Trumpet, the second of the three Woes. Have we been correct to apply historical events to these symbols? The Bible is interested not in man's politics, but in man's relationship with God. The French Revolution may appear to be

[62] Matthew 24:14

primarily a political and social event, but woven throughout the history of Europe (and America) is the story of Christianity and of God's dealing with men. They show God's intense interest in the affairs of man, and His vital concern for His church on earth. If the events portrayed in Chapter 11 are simply local events concerning the Apostolic Church, then it would appear that the Deists like Voltaire were correct; that God has forgotten His people, and has no message for them today. But when the history of the church is laid out like a tapestry, one sees the great significance to world history of the fortunes of the church of Christ on earth. The events surrounding the French Revolution and its effect upon Europe and America are so dramatic that Jesus describes it as one of the woes to come upon the world. It was never in God's plan that humanity should experience the torture that has plagued us through the centuries, and will yet plague us. History has become a long record of man's departure from the will and purpose of God, and His inability thereby to bless us.

But now it is time for the seventh *shofar* to sound.

11-5 The Seventh Trumpet

Rev 11:15-18

> *The seventh angel sounded, and great voices in heaven followed, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the Kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ. He will reign forever and ever!"*
> *16 The twenty-four elders, who sit on their thrones before God's throne, fell on their faces and worshiped God,*
> *17 saying: "We give you thanks, Lord God, the Almighty, the one who is and who was; because you have taken your great power and reigned.*
> *18 The nations were angry, and your wrath came, as did the time for the dead to be judged, and to give your bondservants the prophets, their reward, as well as to the saints, and those who fear your name, to the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth."*

These verses bring us to the end of the seven trumpets, and, as we saw in 8:1, also finalise the seven seals. Now we understand what is written in the scroll; it is the entire story of sin; the fall of Lucifer, the

plan of Salvation, the record of injustices toward the Saviour, and the final outcome of victory for the righteous. All the wrongs committed against God's people are there. All the wrongs of the world are written there. The Holocaust is written there. The genocides of the late 20th Century are written there. Everything done against you and me is written there. No wonder John wanted the scroll opened and read. No wonder he wept when he thought it couldn't be.[63]

Like the seventh seal, the seventh trumpet brings us back to the time of the Second Advent of Christ when He returns in power and great glory. While the seals looked at the story of Christianity from the perspective of the saved, the trumpets have looked at it from the perspective of the unsaved, or 'peoples of the earth'.

This short passage contains the long awaited announcement that the hour has now come for the Bridegroom to come for His bride. The inhabitants of heaven cry out in praise and adoration, for the bride has waited so long. Now it is midnight for the saints as the forces of evil surround them in a time of tribulation such as the world has not before seen. Not only are the righteous persecuted, but like Elijah of old, they are also blamed for the troubles that have come upon the world. The physical earth, unable any longer able to sustain itself, is at the point of collapse, and life has finally become unbearable.

The final events on the planet will no doubt be rapid, for over the preceding decades the rate of environmental damage has slowly increased until it has become obvious to all that the earth is no longer as it was. Increasing anger and conflict have added to the misery of earth's inhabitants, yet as we are told at the end of Chapter 9, the people still refuse to turn away from their corrupt lives and obey God.

Now the nations are angry. Why? Angry because of the unbalanced distribution of wealth! Angry because of the corruption of national leaders who have kept their subjects poor while they lined their pockets with their nation's resources. Angry with the dictators who have oppressed them and denied their basic freedoms for so long. Angry with greedy corporations who have given their shareholders a higher priority than the needs of the planet. Angry with politicians who have

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[63] The great Methodist leader John Wesley said about this passage, "How far are they from the temper of St. John, who inquire after anything rather than the contents of this book." John Wesley, *Notes on Revelation.*

refused to implement policies that may have cost them votes. Angry at every conspiracy theory being promulgated on social media. Angry because they have used by those social movements that secretly hold hidden agendas. Angry with church leaders who have preached smooth religion, but have not warned their flocks of the return of the King. Angry with those whose consciences have led them to live humbly according to God's Law, whose pure lives have been a rebuke to them. Angry because their lives have become fruitless and hopeless.

It is highly significant that this passage specifically refers to those who are responsible for the destruction of the earth. When God made the earth, He made it perfect and finely balanced to sustain life. He did not make it to be exploited. Instead of learning from those who were good stewards of the land, we took it away from them in order to exploit it. Now, even with warnings in our ears about what we are doing, we still do not have the political will to act.

Most importantly, 11:15-18 bring us back to the worship scene described in Chapter 5 when John wept because no-one was found who could break the seals. This is because the seven trumpets were what matters so much to those who have suffered for their faith. God's faithful have cried out at the world's injustice against them since even before Nero blamed them for the burning of Rome. At last they cry out, *"The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, now the Lord will avenge us".* Once again the elders fall on their faces and worship God as they did in 5:8. The trumpets are God's response to the prayers that ascended during the silence. The seven angels stand by awaiting the command to sound them. They wait for half an hour in controlled excitement for they know that God's strange act is about to take place. Finally the prayers are all heard, the censor is cast to the earth and judgment is pronounced against the earth. The trumpeters lift their ram's horns to their lips and the signal is given, to sound them. At the sound the heavenly multitudes of 5:11 give a great shout.

> *For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with God's trumpet. The dead in Christ will rise first, then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. So we will be with the Lord forever.* (1Thessalonians 4:16-17).

11-6 The Ark of the Covenant

Rev 11:19

> *God's temple that is in heaven was opened, and the ark of the Lord's covenant was seen in his temple. Lightnings, sounds, thunders, an earthquake, and great hail followed.*

We learnt at the beginning of this book that the Book of Revelation is divided into seven sections, each commencing with a new view into the Temple. The first was in 1:12 in which John saw Christ walking among the candlesticks of the Temple, and from where he received the messages to the seven churches. The second was 4:1 in which John saw into the throne room of heaven, and from where he saw the opening of the seven seals. The third was in 8:1 in which John observed a silence in heaven prior to the sounding of the seven trumpets.

Now we come to the fourth section, which also commences with a view into the Temple that provides a backdrop for the scenes to follow. This time however, John sees the Ark of the Covenant, which, in the earthly sanctuary, was in the Most Holy Place.

As we work through the book of Revelation we see a progression through the Temple from the Holy Place to the Most Holy Place. The Holy Place was that part of the Sanctuary in which the Priest interceded daily on the sinner's behalf. The Most Holy Place, containing the Ark of the Covenant that contained the Law, was where judgment took place, and was entered only once per year by the High Priest. In the earthly sanctuary these two rooms were separated by a curtain. But as Christ paid the price for our sins, and shed his blood as the perfect Sacrifice, that curtain ripped in two from top to bottom, thereby opening the way into the Most Holy Place once and for all. Thus John's glimpses into the heavenly Sanctuary do not reveal the presence of any barrier between the two apartments. In Chapter 1 John sees Christ walking among the candlesticks; in Chapter 4 John looks through a door into the throne room of God suggesting that the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place are no longer separated. Now in Chapter 11 John is seeing the Ark of the Covenant, which on earth could be seen only by the High Priest. The conclusion to which this brings us is that since Calvary there is no longer any barrier that prevents us coming directly to the throne of God. In heaven everything is the Most Holy Place, for God dwells there.

We have no idea if there is anything inside the Ark in the heavenly Temple. We only know from Hebrews 9:24 that *Christ hasn't entered into holy places made with hands, which are representations of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.*

In the earthly Ark of the Covenant there were certain items placed in it by Moses at the instruction of God. These were the two stone blocks upon which were written the Ten Commandments, a jar of manna, and Aaron's rod that budded.[64] The manna, the food that God miraculously provided for the Israelites in the desert, represented Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life. The rod of Aaron was a sign of his legitimacy as God's chosen priest, and was placed there after a challenge was made to his right to be the high priest. The Ten Commandments were a transcript of the character of God, and were the standard by which God would judge the people.

Therefore while we are not told if anything is inside the heavenly Ark, we do know that being the 'true' Ark, it must serve an even greater purpose than the earthly. The Manna is now Christ Himself; the Priestly order is no longer Aaronic, but is that of Melchizedek.[65] The Law is the standard by which God judges the nations.

In that our study to date has just brought us back to the time of judgment (v.18), it is appropriate that the Most Holy Place is brought to our attention at this time. We are now no longer in a time of intercession, but of judgment. Now Christ moves from among the lampstands to stand before the judgment seat of God; the Intercessor becomes the Judge. Remember though, that this is not bad news for the believer because when the Mediator is the Judge, those who have been forgiven have no fear of the judgment. It is however, a most undesirable event for those who did not avail themselves of the ministry of the Intercessor.

A passage that has major bearing on the subject of judgment is one that we looked at once before in *3-2 Philadelphia.* It is Daniel 8:13-14 "*…How long will the vision about the continual burnt offering, and the disobedience that makes desolate, to give both the sanctuary and the*

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[64] Hebrews 9:4, Exodus 16:33, Numbers 17:10

[65] See Hebrews Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

army to be trodden under foot be? He said to me, 'To two thousand and three hundred evenings and mornings. Then the sanctuary will be cleansed.'"

It is important to spend a moment with the expression "*evenings and mornings*" because it has generated much discussion. In that the context of the passage is the Sanctuary, it is reasonable to suppose that the evening and morning sacrifices are being referred to. Known as the *Tamid,* these were offered twice daily every day for the sins of the people. The evening sacrifice was made to atone for their sins committed through the day, and the morning sacrifice for those committed through the night. Thus there was never a time when the forgiveness was not available for God's people.

Some have suggested that if there were 2300 sacrifices, then the time period is only 1150 days, not 2300. The difficulty then becomes what event covers 1150 days, or a little over 3 years. Preterists assign this prophecy to Antiochus IV Epiphanes who persecuted the Jews and established pagan worship in Jerusalem's temple for three years. However, Antiochus IV does not fulfil even 1150 days, but only 1095 days. There is therefore no reason to see this event in Daniel 8:14.

A better way to understand the 2300 days is to understand that when the expression 'evening and morning' is used, that a twenty-four hour period is referred to. For example at Creation, Genesis tells us that the evening and the morning were the first day, second day, etc. Thus it is not 2300 sacrifices, but 2300 days of sacrifices that are meant here.

In historicism the 2300 days become 2300 years, which commenced with the command by the Persian king Artaxerxes, in 457 BC[66], to rebuild Jerusalem. It terminated 2300 years later in 1844, shortly after the commencement of that period known as 'The Time of the End'.

For this reason many during the 'Philadelphia' period believed that Christ would return in 1844. When He didn't, those who were able to

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[66] Ezra 7:11-28. The date of 457 BC is not seriously disputed, and was recognised by Sir Isaac Newton in *Observations Upon the Prophecies of Daniel*, pp154-157. See also Horn and Wood, *The Chronology of Ezra 7.* It should be pointed out however, that popular Dispensationalist theology teaches that it was a later instruction, issued in 444BC that should be used to commence the date. The weakness with this argument is that Ezra 4:11-16 clearly reveals that the rebuilding of Jerusalem was started after the 457 BC decree, but was stopped due to opposition, and only restarted after Artaxerxes wrote a second letter in 444BC.

rise above the disappointment and ridicule began to understand that the cleansing of the sanctuary was not the return of Christ, but it was the commencement of the heavenly Day of Atonement. It was, in fact, the sounding of the seventh *shofar*, and the commencement of the time *'for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets',* v.18.

We need not suppose that it has required this much time to judge the dead, for Christ could have returned at any time. We do not know why the delay has occurred; we only know from His parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13) that the Bridegroom is delayed. That delay was certainly a test for the bridesmaids, and it is no less a test for the saints of the last generation.

In the days leading up to the earthly Day of Atonement the Israelites were to spend their time soul-searching in order to ensure that they had no sin left unconfessed; that they were in right relationship with God. So this time is also one for Christians to mingle their joy in the Lord with a sincere burden for forgiveness of their sins. While we can have the full assurance that our sins are forgiven and that we are saved, we cannot afford to continue to live sloppy spiritual lives.

With the end of Chapter 11, we now explore a completely different phase of the Book of Revelation. The fourth section, entered by way of the seventh Trumpet, takes us into the conflict between good and evil with its dramatic imagery of beasts and dragons. The principles we have learned so far will assist us find a meaning to it all.

Chapter 12

12-1 The First Woman on the Moon

Rev 12:1-2

> *A great sign was seen in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.*
> *2 She was with child. She cried out in pain, labouring to give birth.*

The three chapters 12, 13 and 14, differ in style from the rest of the Book of Revelation. We have covered seven churches, seven seals and seven trumpets. The seven churches outline the history of Christianity from Apostolic days until the return of Christ; the seven seals tell the same story from the viewpoint of the saved detailing their sufferings for their faith; the seven trumpets concentrate on events during the same period as they pertain to the punishment of those who caused the suffering of the faithful. In Chapter 15 we will continue the series of sevens with the seven bowls, or plagues. Chapters 12-14 however, form a break in the sequence and explore the conflict between good and evil that has raged behind the scenes since the rebellion of Lucifer and the entrance of sin into the world. The imagery is very colourful, in some cases easy to interpret, in others quite difficult. By this time we have established the principles that will help us make sense of the difficult cases.

The first image is, fortunately, fairly straightforward. Presumably God, in His wisdom and compassion, makes the initial symbols easy in order to guide us through those that are more obscure. He follows the same principle in the book of Daniel where the first vision, Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Chapter 2, is easy to interpret, while those that follow are more difficult, but are understood by Chapter 2. This woman is evidently virtuous for she is adorned in God's creation. The moon upon which she stands has no light of its own, but reflects that of the sun. Similarly the true Christian has no light of his or her own, but reflects the light of Christ to others. The crown is '*stephanos',* a crown of victory, and not *'diadema',* a royal crown. We saw in Chapter 1:20 that stars represent angels, and as the word 'angel' simply means 'messenger', our immediate thought is that either the twelve tribes of Israel, or the twelve apostles are referred to by the 12 stars in the

crown. The child she is about to give birth to immediately makes us think of the Christ child.

As we have learned by now to look to the Old Testament as a guide to understanding Revelation, do we find any hint there as to the meaning of this passage? One that comes quickly to mind is Genesis 3:15: "*I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will bruise your head, and you will bruise his heel."* This passage provides the Bible's first promise of One who will come to deal with the sin problem, albeit at no small cost to Himself. This seed is the One to be known as The Messiah, and the woman His ancestral line descending from Eve.

It is also common practice among Bible writers to liken God's faithful to a pure woman. For example Jeremiah 6:2 (KJV) says, *I have likened the daughter of Zion to a comely and delicate woman.* The Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 11:2 and Ephesians 5:25-32 also sees the relationship between Christ and His church as a marriage. Indeed Christ refers to His believers as 'virgins' in Matthew 25:1-13, and at many other times uses the marriage analogy to describe His relationship with His followers. Even the Ordinance of the Last Supper was based on the Jewish betrothal ceremony, the *erusin*, in which the bride, by accepting the cup, pledges herself to her future husband.

We are therefore on very safe ground to see in the woman the body of believers through which the Messiah was to come, and that the child about to be delivered is the Christ. There may be some who see the Virgin Mary in this woman. This view is not without foundation, for the passage also echoes the famous words of Isaiah 7:14, *Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin will conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.*

12-2 Big Red

Rev 12:3-6

> *Another sign was seen in heaven. Behold, a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven crowns.*
> *4 His tail drew one third of the stars of the sky, and threw them to the earth. The dragon stood before the woman*

who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child.
5 She gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron. Her child was caught up to God, and to his throne.
6 The woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that there they may nourish her one thousand two hundred sixty days.

The dragon is identified for us in verse 9 as Satan, and the stars associated with him as his angels. Those who wish to apply a more literal interpretation to these words might see in this creature Herod as he sought to destroy the Christ child. For this reason the dragon, while identified as Satan, also represents the Roman Empire through which Satan operated. However, there appears to be far more involved in the passage as a whole than a single event in Christian history.

The seven heads and ten horns are mentioned again in the Book of Revelation. Both Chapters 13 and 17 contain information that leads us into a better understanding of their meaning. Chapter 17:9-12 informs us that the seven heads are seven hills upon which a corrupt and degraded woman sits, and the ten horns are ten kings that will someday rule for a short time with the beast. More about those when we get there.

Chapter 13, as we shall see when we reach it, is very similar to Daniel 7, a chapter that also describes a beast with ten horns. The Daniel passage we have already discussed under Chapter *3 – 1 Sardis*, and seen that the beast with ten horns represents the Roman Empire, whose capital is also well known as the city on seven hills.

So now we are beginning to see a connection with Rome in this passage; hardly surprising as Rome was the controlling power at the time of Christ's birth. The seven crowns are this time *diademata* – royal crowns rather than the wreaths of victory – *stephanoi* – given to those who are triumphant in battle or sport.

Satan has command over one third of the stars of heaven, the star being a symbol we have already seen in 1:20 to mean an angel. Thus Satan has an incredibly large number of angels. The next section will provide opportunity to explore the origin of sin and Satan in more detail, and to learn the identity of these satanic angels.

The Christ child was in fact snatched from Satan's attempts to destroy Him through Herod. If this passage refers only to that event, then it would be interesting that Egypt, where Joseph and Mary sheltered young Jesus, should be referred to as to 'God and His throne'. This also suggests that the passage has a deeper application. It is more probable that the ascension of Christ is referred to, in which case these few brief words cover the glorious event we studied in Revelation 4 in which we saw Jesus inaugurated as the King of heaven following His ascension.

The woman, we are told - the church, is taken to a desert where Satan has no power over her. She is sheltered there for 1260 days. This number is becoming quite familiar now, for we have looked at it in some detail in Chapter *3 – 1 Sardis,* and in Chapter 11 in dealing with The Two Witnesses. There is no reason to see this as a different 1260 days, and it is certainly the same 1260-year period of Christian history in which the truths of Scripture were all but lost to tradition and regulated religion between 538 and 1798 AD. It might be argued that God did not do a very good job of protecting the woman during this period, but that is not the case. For Satan's wish was to eradicate from the face of the earth, those who 'keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus' (v.17). But this he has never succeeded in accomplishing, for in quiet locations throughout the earth there have always been those who upheld the true faith. Who they were will not be known until the day when all wrongs are made right, and all rights are made known. They were not confined to any one group or faith, but were to be found in all places and walks of life quietly living their lives as a testimony to others so that they too might be drawn to the light of Christ. Thus the desert was not a literal place but it was a symbol of the culture of faith that existed throughout the age of darkness.

12-3 Heavenly Warfare

Rev 12:7-12

> *7 There was war in the sky. Michael and his angels made war on the dragon. The dragon and his angels made war.*
> *8 They didn't prevail. No place was found for them any more in heaven.*
> *9 The great dragon was thrown down, the old serpent, he who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the*

whole world. He was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.
10 I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation, the power, and the Kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ has come; for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them before our God day and night.
11 They overcame him because of the Lamb's blood, and because of the word of their testimony. They didn't love their life, even to death.
12 Therefore rejoice, heavens, and you who dwell in them. Woe to the earth and to the sea, because the devil has gone down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has but a short time."

This passage draws back a curtain on a warfare that is being conducted in heaven between the forces of good and evil, the forces of Michael who became the Christ, and Lucifer who became the devil. This particular battle is described as occurring after the events of Calvary. That Lucifer was able to deceive one third of all the angels says much about his marketing ability, and it is probable that it was not until all heaven saw their beloved Commander bleeding on the cross that they fully understood the true depths of his evil.

It seems that following Calvary, and following the full exhibition of his hatred for Christ, and after which time all heaven fully understood the true nature of his conspiracy, Satan had no further access to heaven. That he had had access to heaven prior to that time is seen from the second chapter of Job where Satan appears before God as Earth's representative. Job 2 suggests that Planet Earth is not the only inhabited world in the universe, but that it is the only one that is not in harmony with God's universal will. Further clues as to the origin of sin are found in Isaiah 14:12-15, and Ezekiel 28:12-19 both of which reveal Lucifer's self-exaltation.

Why did God not simply destroy Satan at the beginning? True, that would have saved much suffering, and would have spared the Son of God from His humiliation, but what effect would it have had on the universe's unfallen inhabitants? Satan had been an exalted angel who was much loved by his fellow angels; he is described by Ezekiel as 'the covering cherub', possibly one of those represented by the golden angels placed on the Ark of the Covenant. Tradition has it that he was the leader of the heavenly choirs and a being of superlative beauty and

magnificence. The one thing that stood in the way of his pre-eminence in heaven was, like Haman's frustration over Mordecai, that Michael did not bow down to him. [67]

Yet his rebellion was subtle and did not immediately reveal its diabolical nature. Just as he approached Christ as an angel of light after the forty-day fast, so he presented himself as heaven's champion against the arbitrary nature of God's government, a government in which the Law of God was a supposed denial of their rights to free choice. Had God simply destroyed him, the unfallen universe would have seen evidence that he had been correct: to question God leads to immediate suppression. This is the way human dictatorships operate, but God's government is based on love. Once the seed of sin had been sown, the weed had to grow until all could taste the bitterness of its fruit, and it was not until the angels of heaven saw the Son of God hanging on Calvary's cross, that the noxious fruit was finally tasted by the entire universe. Then was Satan cast to earth where his fury is great because he knows that now his hand is revealed and his plot exposed as a fraud. Now he knows his death is certain and his time short.

12-4 The Woman Sheltered

Rev 12:13-16

> *When the dragon saw that he was thrown down to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male child.*
> *14 Two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, so that she might be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent.*
> *15 The serpent spewed water out of his mouth after the woman like a river, that he might cause her to be carried away by the stream.*

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67 The entire story of Esther may also be seen as an allegory of the conflict between good and evil in which Esther , the pure and beautiful woman, is willing to give her life to save her people.

16 The earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the river which the dragon spewed out of his mouth.

Satan's rage is especially directed toward those who represent God's people. Again, it is easier to see these people as not necessarily belonging to any social or religious group, but as those who, in whatever situation they find themselves, remain true to the teachings of Jesus Christ, and true to their conscience before God.

We have already identified certain groups such as the Huguenots of France as among these people. However, belonging to one group or another does not of itself necessarily identify an individual as a true follower of Christ. The identifying mark of a true Christian is to be found in spirituality rather than in religion. The Pharisees of Christ's day were intensely religious, but, as evidenced by Nicodemus' incredible ignorance of the ways of the Holy Spirit, were spiritually deficient. Likewise the militant fundamentalists of this era who scream "God is Great" into microphones are undoubtedly among the world's most religious people, but lack any semblance of spirituality at all. Heaven for them is a carnal place designed to satisfy the desires of the flesh.

There is a tendency among most faiths and belief systems to institutionalise over time in order to protect the ideals held by their founders. Thus creed and dogma creep into a faith-based community and gradually change if from a spiritual to a religious organisation. This evolution has certainly been in evidence in the Christian world since Calvary in every branch of Christianity.[68]

Satan is quite satisfied for people to be religious, but Christ said that His kingdom was a spiritual one, one in which its inhabitants will be people of the Spirit and not of the flesh. So it is at those who are spiritual that Satan's wrath is primarily directed.

The imagery of this passage contrasts wet with dry in order to describe the relative security of God's faithful. God uses the desert to protect them, while Satan uses the flood to harass them. Revelation 17:15 tells us that waters represent the populace. Certainly, those faithful ones were safer away from major centres of population, but still needed

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[68] This writer has personally witnessed in his own evangelical community the existence of an 'inquisition' set up to weed out those church workers not fully sympathetic to established doctrines.

to mingle in order to spread the Gospel so that it would be preserved as it has been throughout the centuries.

Nevertheless there is a sense in which a more literal wilderness protected Truth, and that was in the colonial expansion that occurred during the latter years of the 1260-year period. During the 17th Century those mistreated for their faith began to cross the seas to new lands where they could practice and teach their faith to their children without fear of persecution. Notable among these lands was America, which, as is well known, was founded on the principles of religious freedom by those fleeing Europe's religious intolerance. During these years missionaries fanned out from Europe into the far corners of the earth to bring to distant inhabitants a truth that has endured in ever-increasing strength. Today, when the Gospel is to a large extent laid aside by the western world, it is in the villages of the Global South that the Gospel is preserved. What better way to describe this phenomenon than that of the earth helping the woman by opening her mouth to swallow the flood of persecution vomited out by Satan?

12-5 The Remnant

Rev 12:17

> *The dragon grew angry with the woman, and went away to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep God's commandments and hold Jesus' testimony.*

The imagery in this verse reminds us again of Genesis 3:15, which we referred to in *12–1 The First Woman on the Moon*. From the time sin entered the world until the time it will be eradicated there is an unbroken thread of truth preserved as a witness to the world in all ages. At the end of time there will still exist, like the last metres of a bolt of fabric, a remnant that is in all ways identical to that which existed at the first. Its pattern is described as having two characteristics; obedience to God's Word, and the testimony of Jesus.

We need to understand what is referred to by these, but in doing so place ourselves in great danger. The danger lies in our human tendency to see ourselves, or the group to whom we belong, as the only guardian of Truth, and the special object of God's pleasure – that

is why we belong to it. Among many of the world's religions, and especially among certain Christian groups, are those who claim salvation is found only within the walls of their particular faith. Yet such a spirit immediately disqualifies the claimant as the bearer of Truth simply because of the conceit displayed by such an attitude. For if we display any unattractiveness in our faith or in our attitude, we will no longer be the object of the dragon's wrath, and therefore cannot be the ones referred to in this verse.

Therefore, we will not look for a particular group who seems more closely to meet these requirements than another; nor will we seek to harmonise these criteria with our own system of belief. Rather we, if we are wise, will seek to use them as a measure of our own standing before God, and ask the question, "How can I more closely follow the way God leads me so that I may be considered a part of His remnant?"

The Commandments of God. The reference to God's commandments must be presumed to refer to the entirety of God's instruction to man. While the Ten Commandments are an express transcript of God's character, and must be included in this phrase, God speaks to each of us through the entire Scriptures and through our sense of right and wrong – our consciences. Jesus reminded us that if we truly love Him, we will keep His commandments (John 14:15). Thus keeping the commandments involves love. When asked what was the greatest commandment, Jesus responded by quoting two passages from the Scriptures (Matthew 22:36-40). The passages were: *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might* (Deuteronomy 6:5), and …*You shall love your neighbour as yourself* (Leviticus 19:18). Upon these two, He said, hang all the Law and the Prophets – all of Scripture.

True obedience then, true commandment-keeping, is measured primarily in our love for God and for our neighbour. Of course, some have a greater degree of light than others, and may have trod longer roads in their walk with God. These may have developed a deeper understanding of the things of God than those who have but recently taken up the pilgrimage. Still others may have lived in areas of such spiritual darkness that they have had little opportunity to learn of God's commandments, yet through a God-given sense of right and wrong, have developed a character in harmony with God's loving Spirit. Thus the definition of who truly keep the commandments of God is better left for God to decide, for *man looks upon the outward appearance, but God looks upon the heart* (1 Samuel 16:7).

The objection might be made from John 13:34 that Jesus gave us a new Commandment so that if I truly love God and my neighbour, then that replaces the Old law. It may be argued back though, that if I truly love God and my neighbour, then I do not do away with the need for the Commandments, rather I magnify the Commandments. In that case the Commandments become a mirror that enables us to compare ourselves with Christ. Can we really say we love God and then bow before an idol claiming that if we love God that's okay? Can we say we love our neighbour if we lie to them or steal from them?

The argument may also be presented that Christ's death on the cross abolished the law: *having abolished in his flesh the hostility, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man of the two, making peace* (Ephesians 2:15).

This is certainly true of the law written on parchment by Moses, and which contained the ceremonial laws and regulations that governed the worship of the Israelites. The hostility referred to in Ephesians 2:15 refers to the barrier, or partition, placed by the Law of Moses between Jew and Gentile. This wall was removed by the sacrifice of Christ so that both Jew and Gentile may be one in Christ. The enmity was symbolised in the temple barrier past which Gentiles could not pass. The *two,* the Jew and the Gentile, were now *one new man,* the Christian.

When Christ cried out from the cross, *It is finished,* the temple curtain separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy ripped apart revealing the earthly throne of God for all to see. The way to God was made once and for all time for all people. Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us, making obsolete the sacrificial system, and granting people of all nations equal status before God. It was not the Ten Commandments that were abolished; it was the barrier that separated Jew and Gentile.

Others will bring Colossians 2:14-16 to bear as evidence: …*wiping out the handwriting in ordinances which was against us. He has taken it out of the way, nailing it to the cross.*

This is popularly understood to mean that the Ten Commandments were nailed to the cross. However, this is a misinterpretation of the passage. The expression *handwriting of ordinances* is not the *nomos* – the law, it is the written record of our sins – *cheirographon* – that is nailed to the cross when we confess them.

Therefore, when Revelation 12:17 says that the remnant keep the commandments of God, it is the Ten Commandments which speak of our obedience to God and our treatment of others that is referred to. We must also ask the question: why is the dragon furious with those who keep the commandments if they have been nailed to the cross? How can the saints be commended in Revelation 14:12 for keeping commandments that have been abolished? Secondly, if the Law was abolished, we may want to know what Christ meant when He said, *Don't think that I came to destroy the law or the prophets. I didn't come to destroy, but to fulfil* (Matthew 5:17); we must ask why we find the apostles John and Paul stating 14 times that we must obey God's commandments.[69] I suspect that the main reason many Christians apply this passage to the Ten Commandments is because the commandment to remember the Sabbath Day, is included therein and there would be no need to argue against of the other nine. The day called the Sabbath in the Bible is Saturday, the seventh day, and this seems out of place in the Christian world.

The Testimony of Jesus. The second characteristic of those against whom the dragon wars is that they have the testimony of Jesus. What does this mean? At face value it might simply mean that these faithful ones will give testimony on behalf of Jesus, or witness for Jesus. Indeed some versions of the Bible imply this in their translations.[70] Yet the intent of the Greek is deeper than that and suggests a deep faith that is held onto in spite of all pressures to relinquish it.

A clue as to its meaning is found in Chapter 1:9 where John tells us that he was banished to Patmos *for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.* These words parallel Revelation 12:17. For John, the Word of God was the Law and the Prophets – the Hebrew Scriptures. He had no New Testament – he was writing it, or part of it. It was his adherence to the Word of God that earned him the wrath of Rome just as adherence to the Word of God will bring upon the remnant the wrath of the dragon.

Yet John was also on Patmos for the testimony of Jesus. The wording in Greek is identical to Revelation 12:17, and suggests more than

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[69] They are: John 14:15, 14:21, 15:10; 1 Corinthians 7:19; 1John 2:3, 2:4, 3:22, 3:24, 5:2, 5:3; 2John 1:16, Revelation 12:17, 14;12, 22:14.

[70] See for example the New English Bible and the Revised Standard Version among others.

simply speaking about Jesus. By the time John was writing the Book of Revelation, other New Testament records had already been written, and the New Testament was coming together, even if by default rather than by librarianship. The Gospels, including John's own Gospel were already being circulated making it quite possible that it was his own written testimony that had led to his banishment. If this is true then the testimony of Jesus could well be a written document or documents concerning Jesus.

The next clue as to the meaning of this phrase is found in Revelation 19:10. In this passage John mistakenly worships an angel and is rebuked for it. "*I am a fellow bondservant with you and with your brothers who hold the testimony of Jesus. Worship God, for the testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of Prophecy."*

In Hebrew thinking the prophet was a spokesman or woman for God. The prophet's role may have been either to preach, as in the case of men like Jeremiah, or to present God's will to the people, as in the case of Moses. Or he may have been given the ability through dreams or visions to see into the future, as in the case of Daniel and Ezekiel. Therefore the expression "the spirit of prophecy" could at face value imply either or both of those meanings.

However, as we saw in Revelation Chapters 3 and 10 where we looked at Daniel 12:4 and its instruction to close up the prophetic aspects of Daniel's book until the time of the end, there is a special role for prophecy in the last days, and it is in this context that the expression is most meaningful. There are several instances in Scripture that suggest that the spirit of prophecy is more than the Word spoken for Christ, it also involves some form of divine communication being manifested in the end times.

For example, the prophet Joel predicted that in the latter days God, *will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams* (Joel 2:28 KJV). While this prophecy was fulfilled at Pentecost and in the apostolic church as one of the gifts of the Spirit, it also has an end time application. While some church organisations have been pilloried as cults for claiming to have a prophet, it is entirely scriptural to make such a claim in these last days.

Not only did Joel say it would happen, but Christ also told us in Matthew 24:11, 24 that in the last days false prophets would arise who

would "*deceive the very elect*". The existence of false prophets strongly suggests that there will be genuine prophecy being manifested in the last days.

As we have seen in Revelation Chapters 10 and 11, Elijah also has an end-time role as one of God's true witnesses. We saw that he will also return in the last days as a forerunner of the coming King – a prophet. Therefore, before attaching a label to any congregation that claims to have a prophet, it is wise to first test their words to see if what they say is in harmony with the Scriptures. This thought will be further developed when we reach Chapter 19.

Chapter 13

13-1 The Beast from the Sea

Rev 13:1-2

> *Then I stood on the sand of the sea. I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads. On his horns were ten crowns, and on his heads, blasphemous names.*
> *2 The beast which I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were like those of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority.*

This passage alludes strongly to Daniel 7 in which Daniel, over 500 years earlier, saw four beasts arising from the sea. Revelation 17:15 tells us that water represents peoples. Therefore we may assume these four beasts arise from among the populace. They represented the four empires to rule the world from Daniel's time onwards: the lion – Babylon, the bear – Medo-Persia, the leopard – Greece, and the nondescript beast – Rome. These beasts had a total of seven heads (the leopard having four), and ten horns (all on the fourth beast's head).

The beast in our passage in question, which also has seven heads and ten horns, is clearly a composite of these four, and must represent all of them. One difference of note is that John's beast has crowns on its horns, whereas the dragon of Chapter 12 has them on its heads. These crowns, like those on the dragon's heads, are royal, and signify imperial or political power, power given, in this case, by Satan rather than by God.

Is there any significance to the fact that John describes them in the reverse order of Daniels account? John lives in the time of Daniel's fourth beast, the Roman Empire, and so he seems to be looking backwards, and does not directly describe the fourth beast. In the next section we will see that the characteristics of this beast are identical with those of the horn that grew out of the head of Daniel's fourth beast. It is these characteristics that help us see that the little horn of Daniel 7:8 and the beast of Revelation 13:1-2 both represent the antichrist.

They are the power that attempts to stand up in the place of God and demand the worship that is due God alone.

We will also see that the antichrist imitates the very ministry of Christ in establishing his counterfeit religion. Just as Christ commenced His work on earth by coming up from the Jordan River, spending 3½ years on earth, then receiving a deadly wound before arising again, so this beast emerges from the sea, is given 42 months, or 3½ 'years', then receives a deadly wound which is to heal. Even as the fire of the Holy Spirit came upon God's people at Pentecost, so this beast empowers fire to fall from heaven in a false Pentecost.

Thus we need to understand that as we follow the activities of this beast we are seeing the antichrist establishing his own counterfeit religion with its own trinity, its own commandments, its own priests, its own doctrines, and its own rituals.

13-2 The Deadly Wound Healed

Rev 13:3-10

> *One of his heads looked like it had been wounded fatally. His fatal wound was healed, and the whole earth marvelled at the beast.*
> *4 They worshiped the dragon, because he gave his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?"*
> *5 A mouth speaking great things and blasphemy was given to him. Authority to make war for forty-two months was given to him.*
> *6 He opened his mouth for blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his dwelling, those who dwell in heaven.*
> *7 It was given to him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them. Authority over every tribe, people, language, and nation was given to him.*
> *8 All who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of*

the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been killed.
9 If anyone has an ear, let him hear.
10 If anyone is to go into captivity, he will go into captivity. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, he must be killed. Here is the endurance and the faith of the saints.

The reader is strongly recommended to re-read Chapter *3-1 Sardis* as a background to this passage. Initially we do not know at which point in time the wound is given, for the creature spans all the empires. We only know that the healing of this wound causes the dragon and the beast it empowers to be held in the greatest awe.

Verse 5 however, gives us a strong clue as to the particular event being referred to, for the language closely resembles that of Daniel 7's description of the little horn that arises out of the head of the fourth beast. Let us note the similarities. The little horn of Daniel:

- speaks great words against God v.25
- persecutes God's people v.25
- assumes to change times and laws v.25
- continues for a times, two times, and half a time v.25.

The beast of Revelation 13,

- blasphemes against God v.5
- blasphemes the host of heaven v.6
- wars against God's people v.7
- is worshipped by the unsaved v.8
- continues 42 months v.5.

We note that both passages allocate the same time span. In Chapter *3 – 2 Philadelphia w*e saw that 3 ½ times is the same as 42 months using the Hebrew 30-day calendar. We also mentioned in Chapter *1–1 The Time is Near* that the number 7 recurs frequently in unexpected places. Here is an example of this, for there are seven references to this time period in the Books of Daniel and Revelation. They are:

- Daniel 7:25 — a time, times, and half a time
- Daniel 12:7 — a time, times, and half a time
- Revelation 11:2 — forty-two months
- Revelation 11:3 — 1,260 days
- Revelation 12:6 — 1,260 days

- Revelation 12:14 a time, times, and half a time
- Revelation 13:5 forty-two months.

These are not seven different time periods; but the same time period mentioned seven times, presumably to help us understand the importance of the number. All seven verses refer to the same 1,260-year period that the church retained religious and political power over most of the known world between AD 538 and 1798. We see therefore, that the characteristics of the beast of Revelation 13 identify it as the little horn of Daniel 7 and 8.

We were told in verse 2 that the dragon gave the beast its power. In Chapter 12 we saw that the dragon represented Satan and, at that time, Rome through whom Satan worked. When the Roman Emperor Constantine in AD 330 moved his seat of rule from Rome to Constantinople (Istanbul), he effectively left the control of Rome in the hands of the Church. Thus the Bishopric of Rome became the most prestigious within Christendom, not only holding ecclesiastical, but political authority.

Over the decades the Roman church gradually cemented its ascendency over other bishoprics, and began to be seen as the major centre for the government of western Christianity, the church's headquarters. Opposition to this arrangement came most strongly from the Arian nations, those who followed the teaching of Arius (AD 250-336) that Christ was a created being, and therefore not divine. These were primarily the Heruli, the Vandals and the Ostrogoths. As stated in Chapter *3–2 Philadelphia*, It took until AD 538 for Rome finally to eradicate the Arian threat to Christianity[71], and from that time onward they had not only ecclesiastical, but unchallenged political power over Europe.

As already noted in Chapter *3 – 2 Philadelphia,* the Church retained its political power for 1260 years from 538 to 1798 when General Berthier, under Napoleon's orders, marched to Rome and took the Pope prisoner.

The healing of the wound probably cannot be pinpointed to any one time or event, for throughout the 19th Century Italian territories that had been under Church control, known as the Papal States, continued to be

[71] The Ostrogoth nation existed for some time after 538AD, but it was in this year that their army withdrew from Rome, defeated by Justinian.

the subject of dispute. It was the Lateran Treaty of 1929 that took the most significant step in restoring the Church to its independence. By this treaty between the Italian government and the Papacy, the government recognised Papal authority over a 44-hectare territory known as Vatican City, along with the right to consider Rome as the "centre of the Catholic world and place of pilgrimage."[72] In return the Papacy recognised the state of Italy with Rome as its capital.

Since that time the Church has continued to grow in prestige and authority with the Pope today being considered the world's principal representative of Christianity. Revelation 13:8 makes it clear that this power will continue to grow until the entire world will give it allegiance.

This passage and its historicist interpretation present profound difficulties for the sensitive Christian. Is it really possible that all those who worship this throne will be classed as among the enemies of God? Does this church really blaspheme God's name? Perhaps of all the messages of Revelation, this is the most difficult. We all know of so many wonderful people who faithfully serve God through this faith. We can only assume that in the final days the issues will become clear, and a polarisation take place with those who are God's separating themselves from any system of religion not in harmony with the Scriptures.

It is also difficult to believe that the entire world will worship this throne. Will non-Christians also fall at its feet? Today they would certainly deny that. Yet perhaps the events that are to come upon the world will be so dramatic that when this Church is given the power to perform great miracles as in verses 13-14, then the world will turn to it as their only hope.

In today's ecumenical milieu it is most inappropriate to display any intolerance of another's faith. The fact is that with the decline in western morality, it is this Church, almost alone, which has stood up for the ideals taught by Scripture. For that reason we should understand that it is not any organisation itself that is the beast, nor any individual that is the antichrist; it is how that organisation worships and how it seeks to control the worship of others that makes it the beast.

Thus we must seek a sensitive understanding of these prophecies that allows for a bigger picture than we are often prone to paint. It is not

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[72] Lateran Treaty, Article 1, see Encyclopaedia Britannica, article Lateran Treaty.

until the climax of history that the beast again becomes a persecuting power, and events have not yet, in the first quarter of the twenty-first Century, developed to that extent. It is quite probable that it is not until we see these events take place that we will more fully understand these prophecies.

On the non-Christian horizon we see an increasing influence in fundamentalist Islamism, but the efforts required to uphold such an extreme position may make long-term enforcement quite unsustainable. One may ask why the upsurge of Islamist influence in the world is not specifically identified in Revelation. Possibly because Revelation is primarily a Christian book that deals with the history and future of the Christian world. Possibly because it will be of a more transient nature than it currently seems. We again remember Christ's words that we are given prophecy, not so much to tell the future, but so that when we see these things take place, then we shall understand (John 14:29, 16:4).

While many Christians would be incredulous at the scenario just presented, considering it so much nonsense, there is one underlying principle that threads its way through the conflict between good and evil, and must be recognised in order to place these predictions in context. It is the theme of worship. From righteous Abel to the pouring out of the seventh plague, the subject of the conflict is how God is worshipped. Cain offered the produce of his own hands, but Abel's offering contained the blood of the sacrifice. Cain killed Abel because of the way he worshipped.

While Moses was in the presence of God receiving His holy law, the people were in the plain worshipping a golden calf in direct contravention of the laws Moses was being given.

When Elijah clashed with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, the issue was again over worship and obedience to the Word of God (1 Kings 18).

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were sentenced to immediate death for their refusal to worship other than the way God had instructed them (Daniel 3).

When the Persian leaders sought a way of removing Daniel from office, they noted that the only way they could do it was in the way he worshipped his God (Daniel 6).

There are countless Scriptural examples that could be cited of how obedience in worship is at the centre of the conflict between good and evil. The reader has only to read the accounts of the Children of Israel to see this theme cropping up again and again. For this reason we can understand that the final events upon the earth will also be over the issue of worship and obedience in worship. The dragon is wrath with those who worship in truth because they keep the commandments of God, and worship accordingly (Revelation 12:17).

This helps us to understand that the end-time issues are primarily religious in nature, and do not concern secular organisations such as the United Nations or the European Union except as they might attempt to make resolutions concerning religion and worship. Rather, it is religious legislation that will be on the beast's agenda. Therefore, instead of pointing the finger at any one religious entity we are safer to see the beast of Chapter 13 as a composite of all religious experience that seeks to control the way we way worship, and that opposes those who worship according to the Law of God and the Bible.

One thing is sure from Chapter thirteen: that is that we see a development in religious history towards an end-time climax that results in a polarisation between those who worship in obedience to the will of God, and those who worship according to the authority of the beast. This will be evident and understandable to the entire world.

13-3 The Beast from the Earth

Rev 13:11-12

> *I saw another beast coming up out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, and he spoke like a dragon.*
> *12 He exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence. He makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed.*

As John saw this creature emerge from the earth, he may have hoped it was friendly, for the first things he would have seen were its two lamb-like horns. Presumably the rest of the animal, as it came to view,

appeared not to have overly alarmed him. He makes no attempt to describe it so it presumably was not too outlandish. It is not until it speaks that John realises that its character belies its appearance.

The description of the horns as lamb-like is significant. A lamb is used as a symbol for Christ throughout the New Testament, and the Book of Revelation refers to Him as the Lamb 29 times. In 5:6 Christ is seen as a Lamb with seven horns. This creature therefore gives an initial appearance of being Christ-like, but is far from it in reality. This means it also represents a form of religion, one that fulfils the words of Christ that in the last days false Christs will arise that will deceive even 'the very elect' (Matthew 24:24). To do this the beast must be extremely convincing.

The creature emerges from the earth in contrast to the sea from whence its forerunner came. We saw in the previous chapter that waters represent a populace, but also suggest turbulence, strife and warfare. This creature then, by contrast, comes from a place where density of population, strife and political and military turmoil do not exist. Furthermore we would expect to see it emerge at the end of the 42-month reign of the first beast, namely toward the end of the eighteenth Century. Where could this be? Bible commentators of a bygone era look to the Middle East as such a place, but today the land that sits between Persia and Palestine has an agenda that does not fit that of the best that comes from the sea.

However, a new land was emerging at this time, not to the east of Rome, but to the West. It's 1776 Declaration of Independence declared that *We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.*

This is in sharp contrast to the religious intolerance that existed in Europe for centuries, but how and when and why will it depart from such lofty ideals to become a persecuting power? We shall seek an answer to this question in the next section.

We draw an important conclusion here that helps clarify the relationship between these two creatures. The first is worshipped; the second is empowered by the first. The first, by demanding worship, must be a religious power. The second, which legislates the worship of the first, must be a secular power. Hence we see in these two creatures the

amalgamation of church and state. Historically speaking, Europe existed under such conditions for 1260 years from AD538 to AD1798. Now we are told that the first beast, the one that controls worship, was given a deadly wound which would be healed. Thus we can conclude that the wound was inflicted in 1798, but sometime in the future would be healed so that once again church and state will unite to once again persecute God's people.

13-4 The Image to the Beast

Rev 13:13-15

> *He performs great signs, even making fire come down out of the sky to the earth in the sight of people.*
> *14 He deceives my own people who dwell on the earth because of the signs he was granted to do in front of the beast, saying to those who dwell on the earth that they should make an image to the beast who had the sword wound and lived.*
> *15 It was given to him to give breath to it, to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause as many as wouldn't worship the image of the beast to be killed.*

The relationship between the first and second beasts and the image to the first beast is complex. The dragon, or Satan, gives power to the first beast (v.2), which in turn empowers the second beast (v.12). The first beast also gives the second beast the power to bring the image of the first beast to life (v.15).

The image of the first beast must be identical in form to that beast, sharing the same theology and worship pattern. But it is the second beast that interfaces with the world's population, as though some form of intermediary between the first beast and the people. While performing great miracles, it does not demand worship of itself; rather it demands an image of the first beast be set up for worship.

We see here the beginnings of a counterfeit trinity. The second beast, Christlike in appearance, but demonic in character, acts as intermediary between the people and the beast that has established himself in the

place of God. The image of the first beast forms the third member of this trinity as an evil counterfeit to the Holy Spirit - an unholy spirit. We will see more of this diabolical alliance as we progress.

In that this is still future, it is difficult, even dangerous, to be too specific about the details of these events. It seems though, that the lamb-like beast is a united pseudo-Christian force that emerges in obscurity, but that eventually dominates the entire world presenting itself as some sort of global saviour. For a religious power to have such influence is incredible. In order for it to be able to order the deaths of those who do not accept its authority, the planet's situation will have to be exceedingly dire. What could bring that about?

We are currently beginning to see some evidence of this in the effects of global warming, the failure of nation-states, terrorist activity, and the expansionism of certain powerful and ambitious nations. It is not necessary to spend any time enumerating these issues as we see them daily on the wide screen. Now, as we approach the end of the first quarter of the twenty-first Century, we are beginning to see something else; the emergence of a generation raised unaware of the values upheld by their church-attending grandparents. Behaviours that are in direct contravention to the Word of God are now flaunted and even legislated. It seems that we are in rebellion against God Himself. These behaviours have existed before as empires have come and gone, but now it is happening on a global scale. In order for the scenario described in Revelation 13 to come about, there will have to be a backlash against this emerging godlessness, and that is not so difficult to understand when we accept that God cannot bless a people who have rejected Him. Societies that do not pray to God have no connection with God, and God has no connection with them. Thus as His Spirit is withdrawn from the earth, we are left to our own sinfulness and with the natural consequences that will attend it. So the condition of the planet will continue to deteriorate until it will seem that the only means of saving ourselves is through some form of religious revival; a return to religion, not of people's free will, but through enactment of religious laws. These laws, unfortunately, will be based, not on the Word of God, but upon the traditions of man.

The subtlety of the second beast suggests to us that such laws may not appear at first to be inherently dangerous, but will initially present a benign face. For example, we might expect to see the enactment of legislation that strengthens the family unit by setting aside Sunday as a family day. Such legislation is of itself good as long as it remains purely

social in intent. But we know, from the nature of this beast, that the lamb is a wolf in sheep's clothing.

The lamb-like beast, enforcing some form of religious union, will have the ability to perform miracles that will sufficiently impress the inhabitants of the earth to follow its instruction to set up an image to the first beast. What kind of miracles are these? The reference to bringing fire from heaven alludes to Elijah the prophet who on several occasions commanded fire to come from heaven, the most notable being on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18). On this occasion the one who brought fire from heaven was to be accepted as God's true prophet. The false prophets tried all day to bring the fire, but were unable to. Elijah succeeded with one short prayer. Thus the second beast's ability to bring fire from heaven will be interpreted by the world as its being the true prophet of God.

Yet there will be those who will refuse to obey the beast. Who are they, and why? We were told in 12:17 that it is those who obey God's commandments and have the testimony of Jesus who will be the special objects of Satan's hatred. We know then that it will be the Word of God, the Holy Bible, that God's faithful ones will use to sift truth from error. From the Bible they will be able to discern a true from a false prophet, and will see that while the second beast appears to promote Christ, and appears to do great things in the name of Christ, it neither upholds, nor speaks in harmony with, the Word of God.

This again re-emphasises the importance of reading the Bible. The follower of Jesus must never fail to spend time with the Word of God daily, for just as the body cannot live without food, so the soul cannot live without spiritual food. In this way truth will become deeply engrained in our minds, so that when error is presented it will be immediately discerned. Just as the sheep know the voice of the shepherd, so by reading the Bible will the student of Scripture know the voice of the Master.

13-5 The Mark of the Beast

Rev 13:16-17

> *He causes all, the small and the great, the rich and the poor, and the free and the slave, to be given marks on their right hands, or on their foreheads;*

> [17] *and that no one would be able to buy or to sell, unless he has that mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name.*

It has served us well so far to consider the Hebrew Scriptures in seeking understanding of Revelation, and again it comes to our assistance. There are two references to a mark. One is given to Cain as protection against those who would wish to harm him (presumably his descendants would have blamed him for their situation). This was probably a literal mark, although no details of it are given.

The other is referred to in Ezekiel 9:4-6 in which a mark is placed upon the forehead of all those*" that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that are done within"* Jerusalem. This mark was placed symbolically upon the foreheads of those God would save from destruction. Revelation thirteen's mark will be placed on the forehead or the hand of those who will be destroyed. Does this teach us something? The forehead implies belief and the hand implies action. We may well deduce then that the righteous are saved, not by their deeds, but by what they believe and hold dear. They are not marked on the hand because it is not their actions that God considers in judging them.

The unsaved, on the other hand, may be lost not only by what they believe, but also by what they do. Whereas eternal life is the unmerited gift of God, death is a payment as a wage (Romans 6:23), and is something earned. While there may be those not marked on the hand - those who did not actively participate in activities against the righteous - they gave their allegiance to the beast, and are thus marked on the forehead.

This mark presumably has some physical characteristics, for its presence enables the bearer to buy or sell. Today the technology is in place to know the most personal details of anyone who uses the internet or social media. We are already seeing our privacy trampled upon in the interest of national security. It is now quite easy to see how selected people could become the targets of Revelation 13:16-17.

The passage informs us that the mark is also the name of the beast. Many New Testament manuscripts do not include the word 'or' in the KJV expression, *save he that had the mark,* <u>or</u> *the name of the beast.* Thus it may be more accurate to understand the person having the mark as also having the name of the beast. In other words the mark of

the beast is its name.[73] Therefore it is the name of the beast that is written on the hand or forehead of the unforgiven. In the next chapter, Revelation 14:1, we will similarly read that John sees the redeemed having the Father's Name written on their foreheads.

But what is the beast's name? In Bible times names were given to represent a character. So those redeemed who wear the Name of the Father on their foreheads reflect His character in their lives. So those who bear the mark of the beast will be those who reflect its character by giving their allegiance to its false system of worship.[74]

We learned from Revelation 12:17 that those who are the special object of the beast's wrath are *those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus* (KJV). We must therefore conclude that the major last-day issue will concern belief in, and obedience to, the Bible. Evidently legislation enacted under the authority of the lamb-like beast will be unacceptable to those who bear the character of Christ, and have the Father's Name on their foreheads, and who make the Bible their rule for life. Therefore any such legislation must fly in the face of the Word of God, and specifically the Commandments of God. Their refusal to compromise their allegiance to the Scriptures will result in their forfeiting the right to buy or sell, and ultimately, according to Revelation 13:15, being put to death. For the Western world to take such steps suggests that the events to fall upon this planet are of far greater magnitude than we can now conceive.

13-6 The Number of the Beast

Rev 13:18

> *Here is wisdom. He who has understanding, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man. His number is six hundred sixty-six.*

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[73] For example see Pulpit Commentary article Revelation 13:17. "A, B, C, P, and most cursives also omit ἤ, "or," before "the name," thus reading, as in the Revised Version: save he that hath the mark, even the name of the beast, or the number of his name."

[74] The reader may wish to refer back to *7-2 The Sealing* for a more in-depth look at the relationship between name and character.

This passage is a favourite for speculation. There is no end of the fun we can have with this number. A website search of the number comes up with a thoroughly confusing muddle of claims to the solution of this riddle. The more traditional interpretations are *Caesar Neron* (Nero), and *Vicarius Filii Dei* (a title attributed to the Pope) using Hebrew and Latin numerals respectively. A few minutes spent playing this game soon reveals that there are hundreds of name combinations that can add up to 666 in one code or another. The Latin numeral symbols DCLXVI, each used once in decreasing order of magnitude also total 666. With so many names containing these letters it is not difficult to find someone who has the number of the beast. [75]

Although instructed in the passage to calculate the number, this method usually lacks Christian charity, and results in the denigration of the individual or organisation so identified. Furthermore it encourages dangerous and malicious conspiracy theories that serve no good purpose to the cause of Christianity, and leads the adherent away from the development of the character of Christ.

Following on from this thought, it should be noted that the passage begins with the words *here is wisdom.* I cannot help but conjecture that there is little wisdom in doodling with the numbers and coming up with an individual who we think fits the bill. The passage does not contain the define article, and may equally be, *the number of man.* Man was created on the sixth day, so in that sense six is man's number.

In fact, the Scriptures do not state that the number should be interpreted by attaching numerical values. To date we have attempted to allow Scripture to interpret Scripture, and this has proved the most meaningful way of understanding complex passages.

There are two other references to this number in the Bible. One is found in Ezra 2:13 and refers to the number of descendants of Adonikam, one of the Jews who returned to Israel after the Babylonian captivity (According to Nehemiah 7:18 , Adonikam had 667 descendants).

The other is slightly more significant, but still questionably so. It is found in 1 Kings 10:14 and 2 Chronicles 9:13, and refers to the weight of gold that King Solomon received annually at the height of his power

[75] The number also has interesting mathematical properties as is pointed out in several websites.

(666 talents). Interestingly, the records following this reference begin to tell of his, and Israel's, decline.

We have noted the importance of the number seven in the Book of Revelation as the number of completion or perfection. It was the seventh day that God blessed and set aside as a memorial to His Creation, and numerous times in Revelation we are reminded of this. The number seven then is the number of God.

The number six therefore, somehow falls short of God's perfection, as though "the refusal of man to proceed to seven, to give glory to God as Creator and Redeemer".[76] The number six is the number that the beast adopts as its own because it challenges God's omniscience and creatorship. By using it three times, he attempts to establish his own unholy counterfeit trinity of the first and second beasts and the image to the first beast, and thereby to *"make myself like the Most High"* (Isaiah 14:14).

The number six also had mathematical significance to the Babylonians whose priests wore an amulet consisting of 36 squares each containing a number from 1-36. The totals of each full column vertically, horizontally, and diagonally added up to 111, and the totals of the six columns or rows, 666 .

From now on we shall run across several references to Babylon as the city representing the home of false worship. It was originally Babylon from which came the religion that first challenged God, and it was in response to their tower that God confused their language (Genesis 11). Thus Babylon represents confusion and symbolises man's attempts to establish his own religion in opposition to the true worship of God. So this trinity of sixes stands for man's resistance to the true worship of God, and as it is the beast that spearheads this opposition, he is ultimately the one whom the number represents.

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[76] Beatrice S. Neall, *The Concept of Character in the Apocalypse With Implications for Character Education*, Washington: University Press, Inc. 1983, pp. 153-155. Quoted in *God Cares* Vol 2, C. Mervyn Maxwell, Pacific Press, Boise, Idaho 1985, p. 415

Chapter 14

14-1 Following the Lamb

Rev 14:1-5

> *I saw, and behold, the Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with him a number, one hundred forty-four thousand, having his name, and the name of his Father, written on their foreheads.*
> *2 I heard a sound from heaven, like the sound of many waters, and like the sound of a great thunder. The sound which I heard was like that of harpists playing on their harps.*
> *3 They sing a new song before the throne, and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the one hundred forty-four thousand, those who had been redeemed out of the earth.*
> *4 These are those who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are those who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These were redeemed by Jesus from among men, the first fruits to God and to the Lamb.*
> *5 In their mouth was found no lie, for they are blameless.*

This last chapter in the section (that deals with the good and evil theme) brings us to the final events leading to and including the return of Christ. Chapter 12 gave us an overview of the theme in broad strokes, covering the time from the birth of Christ until the end of the 1260-day (year) period. Chapter 13 focuses mainly on the events between the end of the 1260 days and the time when the earth's inhabitants finally align themselves with one side or the other having either the mark of the beast or the seal of God. Chapter 14 now turns our attention to those who have the seal of God.

We have already discussed the 144,000 in some detail in *7-3 The 144,000, and 7-4 The Great Multitude,* and the reader may wish to refer back to those chapters. Their identifying features may be listed as follows:

- They have the name of God and the Lamb on their foreheads.
- They sing a new song, the words of which are known only by them.
- They are redeemed from the earth.

- They are pure and undefiled.
- They follow the Lamb wherever He goes.
- They were purchased and offered as the firstfruits to God.
- They told no lie and were blameless.

We now understand the meaning of the name on their foreheads, and we understand that their purity is as a result of their faithfulness. Their honesty is noted as though this is considered as a unique quality of those who made the Scriptures their judge of right and wrong. The fact that they are blameless does not mean they committed no sin; it means that they had confessed their sins and been cleansed of them. The repentant sinner not only is forgiven, but also is considered blameless, in God's sight. Thus did God describe King David as one who "*did only what is right in my eyes*" (1Kings 14:8) in spite of his misconduct concerning Uriah and his wife. The confession of his sin, recorded in Psalm 51, provides a sublime record of a penitent's plea.

That these follow the Lamb is another of the metaphorical oddities found in Scripture. Just as being washed in blood does not normally make one white, so one does not normally follow a lamb. Yet Christ's kingdom is one in which all that seems normal is overthrown; the blind see and those who see are blind; the first are last and the last are first; the poor are rich and the rich are poor; the great become servants and the servants become great, the Lamb defeats the dragon. Indeed, God's ways are not man's ways, and in the last days those who follow the Lamb will appear as fools in the eyes of the world.

What is this new song that only the redeemed can sing? It is the song of their experience. For in all the history of the universe these are the only ones who have experienced sin and overcome it. Throughout the limitless realms of space, inhabitants of heaven and of other worlds will differ from this small flock, for they have not fallen. They cannot sing this song because they do not know the words. The thought alludes to the song of Moses after the Jews' deliverance from Pharaoh.

> *You will bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of your inheritance,*
> *the place, Yahweh, which you have made for yourself to dwell in…* (Exodus 15:17)

Lest this passage discourage those who feel they can never be among this number, let us remember that they are sealed only on the forehead, not the hand. The penitent thief, executed for his crimes, will be among

them. Rahab the Jericho prostitute, Zacchaeus the greedy little tax collector, the woman caught in adultery, the slave trader, will all be there - Amazing Grace! None of us has any cause to fear that we can't be in that number, for the blood of the Lamb is sufficient to purify even the worst of men. When we are in Christ, the Judge sees not us, but Christ in us.

14-2 The First Angel's Message

Rev 14:6-7

> *I saw an angel flying in mid heaven, having an eternal Good News to proclaim to those who dwell on the earth, and to every nation, tribe, language, and people.*
> *7 He said with a loud voice, "Fear the Lord, and give him glory; for the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and the springs of waters!"*

In the period prior to the return of Christ there is a work to be done on behalf of the Gospel. But it is not done by God alone, it is done, at His bidding, by faithful men and women working under the His Spirit. Prior to the Second Advent of Christ, a message of warning must be given. God never intervenes in the affairs of humankind without first sending a messenger to warn them. Noah was sent to warn of the flood, Jeremiah the captivity, John the Baptist the first advent. So how much more will God send a messenger before His second advent? The prophet Malachi predicted (Malachi 4:4-5) that Elijah would return before *'the great and terrible day of the Lord'*, and Christ said this referred to John the Baptist, but that Elijah would still yet come.

Will this messenger be an individual who dresses like Elijah or John the Baptist, or will he be a worldwide movement? Given the global nature of this message it is reasonable to assume it will be a worldwide movement that has the characteristics of both Elijah and John. What were those characteristics? Both men lived godly lives and used a simple lifestyle, and John had taken a vow to use no alcohol. They drew men's attention not to themselves but to their message. Both men suffered hardship because of their unwelcome words that pricked the

consciences of their hearers. In both cases it was the common people, and not the authorities, that welcomed them.

Their message has to be given to the entire world. Only today is it becoming possible to see how that can happen. Through dedicated satellite TV channels, through live streaming, through cable networks, through short-wave radio, it is now possible to beam the Gospel to all corners of the earth. With the rate at which the world's population is increasing, God has needed to provide a means of spreading the warning that outstrips this growth. Now with the relative ease with which even poor communities can purchase satellite dish or smart phone, this message may be broadcast in any language to any part of the world with relative ease. Yet this same technology is the only means by which the message can penetrate the locked gates of mansions and penthouses.

But what is the message? It is not the message that is commonly heard from the popular preachers who talk about prosperity and healing. This one takes the form of a warning of coming judgment, and is not one that people will flock to hear. There is no doubt that the message of this angel will not be a popular one, nor easy. It is a message that says in effect, "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand". Who today has the courage to preach such a message?

Where else have we heard this message? In fact we have heard it every time God has planned to intervene in the affairs of man. The first time it was by Noah, who for 120 years preached that God would destroy the earth with a flood. The people laughed, but Jesus said, *as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be in the days of the Son of Man* (Matthew 24:37).

It was also preached by Elijah when he said on Mount Carmel, *How long will you waiver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him. But if Baal, then follow* him (1 Kings 18:21). The Carmel experience brought a time of decision for Israel, and judgment fell upon the false prophets that day. Following this event a small cloud appeared as a token of God's sending rain upon the earth. We see in Revelation 14 another cloud appear (v.14), and judgment again then takes place. In fact, Baal was recognised in Israel as "the god of the storm" because of his supposed ability to control the weather. Therefore the Mt. Carmel event demonstrated the it was not Baal, but Yahweh who had the real power over the elements, for it was Yahweh

who has shut the heavens for 3 1/2 years, and who now brought the rain upon the land.[77]

Isaiah and Jeremiah were also sent to the people of Judah and Jerusalem before its destruction by Nebuchadnezzar. Then again this message was preached by John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Messiah, a voice in the wilderness. He also came in the Spirit and power of Elijah saying, *"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For One is coming…"* The One who came, Jesus the Christ, established the foundations of His kingdom by enrolling its first citizens. They were all those who believed in Him and who accepted His invitation to come to Him. They were the leper, the blind and the lame, healed because in His kingdom disease will not exist. They were the oppressed, the widow and the orphan, because these are the ones He cared about the most. They were the prostitute, the murderer, and the thief, because these repented of their past and were forgiven. But they did not include the religious leaders, the theologians and the experts in God's law; because these were too proud to admit that they too were in need of a Saviour. They preferred the kingdom they already had – and that was their reward.

That was Christ's first advent - when He came as the Prophet. But when He comes the second time it will be as the King. He will come to consummate the kingdom He established at His first visit, and to remove those who will not be a part of it – in His own words, to separate the sheep from the goats.

One of the characteristics of the sheep, according to our passage, is that they will have worshipped God as Creator. The command to worship *Him who made the heavens and the earth, the sea and the springs of water* must surely be significant. It suggests that the 'goats' do not recognise God's Creatorship. We saw in *3-3 Laodicea* that it was during the mid-nineteenth Century that attention was drawn on a worldwide scale to the soon return of Christ. It was also at this time that God's Creatorship was challenged, and for the first time an alternative theory of man's origins was widely accepted. Today, one who believes in Creation rather than in evolution is considered weak-minded; yet Christ has made belief in Biblical Creation one of the identifying features of His people.

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[77] See Encyclopaedia Britanica, article *Baal*.

The reference to Him who made the heavens and the earth, the sea and the springs of water also alludes to the Fourth Commandment where these words are also used: Exodus 20: 8-11 says: *"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy… for in six days Yahweh made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore Yahweh blessed the Sabbath day, and made it holy.*

In the light of the future scenarios presented in Chapter 13, is it possible that God is seeking a return to this day of worship prior to His return? Isaiah foretold that in the New Earth God's people would come together from Sabbath to Sabbath (Isaiah 66:23). Does God seek a return to His Creation and Redemption rest day prior to His return as King? For not only did God rest on the Sabbath day following the Creation, but Christ also rested on the Sabbath day following his crucifixion. Easter Sabbath was not a 'nothing day' as some have suggested, but the day that God rested from the finished work of redemption.

These clues help us to see that the latter-day Elijah message will be presented by a people who are probably unsophisticated and unpretentious, like John, a voice in the wilderness. In 12:17 these are described as *"the remnant that keep the commandments and have the testimony of Jesus".* Theirs will be a message that brings conviction to the soul of the hearer that they must repent of their sins for the King is coming. They will teach the Biblical origins of the universe when the world believes differently. They will teach obedience to the Law of God when the world sees obedience to the Law as legalism. They will hold to the biblical standards of morality when powerful lobby groups, politicians, and businesses cry out for change. Most importantly, they will testify of Jesus as the only means of salvation.

One final thought on this passage: In *1-1 The Time Is Near* we took a brief look at chiastic structures and observed how Hebrew writings sometimes follow a structure of mirror imaging its thoughts and ideas. We saw that the ideas presented in Chapter 1 are paralleled in Chapter 22, and that the visions of Chapters 2-11 are paralleled in the visions of Chapters 15-21, albeit from a different perspective. The apex of the structure is found in Chapters 12-14 which deal with the Good versus Evil theme.

While room must be left for differences of opinion on this subject. It is of note that Chapters 12:17 and 14:12 both refer to those who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony, or faith, of Jesus.

These two parallel thoughts hint the direction the chiasm is taking so that we might expect the apex of the chiasm to be somewhere between those two verses. When we read the text between we find the major issue to be one of worship. Chapter 13, especially verses 8-15, deals with false worship while Chapter 14, especially verses 6-7, deals with true worship. In that the conflict between Good and Evil is centred on worship, we would certainly expect the chiasm to point to an instruction to worship the true God. For that reason the central focus of the Book of Revelation is best identified as Revelation 14:7: *Worship him who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and the springs of waters!"* This may be put in diagrammatic form as follows:

A. Prologue 1:1-8: Beatitude, Second Coming, Alpha & Omega.
  B. God's People 2:1 – 3:22: The Seven Churches
    C. 6:1 – 8:1 The Seven Seals
      D. 8:2 – 11:19: The Seven Trumpets
        E. 12:1-17: First Advent of Christ
          F. 13:1-18: Call to worship the beast
            G. 14:6-7. Call to worship the Creator
          F. 14:8-11: Results of worshipping the beast
        E. 14:14-20: Second Advent of Christ
      D. 15-17: The Seven Plagues
    C. 20:1-15: The Millennium
  B. God's People 21:1 – 22:5: The New Jerusalem
A. Epilogue 22:6-21: Alpha & Omega, Beatitude, Second Coming.

14-3 The Second Angel's Message

Rev 14:8

> *Another, a second angel, followed, saying, "Babylon the great has fallen, which has made all the nations to drink of the wine of the wrath of her sexual immorality."*

By now it should come as no surprise that Babylon is mentioned just six times in the Book of Revelation. This is the first, and alludes to Isaiah 21:9. It has however, been referred to indirectly in *2-3* as 'Satan's Seat', and in more detail in Chapter 13 with reference to the mystical number 666. In that the literal city of Babylon had been in ruins for centuries, the reference is certainly symbolic, and as we saw in *13-6 The Number of the Beast* the reference represents the religious system that Satan

has developed in defiance of heaven. Babylon stands in opposition to Jerusalem, the city of God. Thus we see that the Book of Revelation is very much a tale of two cities, and that the world is indeed in a cosmic conflict as the Lamb faces the dragon and ultimately defeats him.

The Apostle Peter, in 1 Peter 5:13 refers to the church in Babylon. In fact, it appears from the context that this is where he is writing from. There were some small towns throughout the Roman Empire named Babylon, but they were obscure, and it is highly unlikely that Peter was living in any of them. It is most probable that Peter was in Rome at the time, and that he referring to Rome as Babylon.

The second angel follows the first, but presumably the first message continues to be sounded until Christ returns. In that Babylon, the hub of false religion has not yet fallen, this message must be future in that sense, but present in the sense that we know that its downfall is certain.

14-4 The Third Angel's Message

Rev 14:9-11

> *Another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a great voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead, or on his hand,*
> *10 he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is prepared unmixed in the cup of his anger. He will be tormented with fire and sulphur in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb.*
> *11 The smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever. They have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.*

If the first two angels' messages are unpopular, this one will certainly make the messenger a pariah. The mark of the beast is an emotive issue, yet Jesus is the source of the message, and while He always acts in love, He never minces His words. This passage informs us that even though God is love, there will come a time when Christ will act as He did when He drove the moneychangers out of the temple in Jerusalem. The messenger has no option but to deliver this message

regardless of the reaction. In that we have already discussed the mark in some detail (see 13-5), we will remind the reader once again that this is still a future occurrence, and that nobody so far has it.

The Cup of His Anger

It is easy to pass over this phrase, but it is highly significant. These few words reveal the Gospel in a most unexpected and powerful way. We have seen how *Revelation* frequently alludes to the Hebrew Scriptures in that their thoughts, expressions and ideas keep reappearing in this book. This phrase is no exception. David wrote of it in Psalm 75:

> *For in the hand of the LORD there is a cup,*
> *And the wine is red;*
> *It is fully mixed, and He pours it out;*
> *Surely its dregs shall all the wicked of the earth*
> *Drain and drink down.* (v8, NKJV)

Isaiah uses very similar words to describe the day that Jerusalem was taken captive by Babylon (see 2Kings 25):

> *Awake, awake!*
> *Stand up, O Jerusalem,*
> *You who have drunk at the hand of the LORD*
> *The cup of His fury;*
> *You have drunk the dregs of the cup of trembling,*
> *And drained it out.* (Isaiah 51:17 NKJV)

Jeremiah the prophet warns of judgement to come upon the nations with these words:

> *For thus says the LORD God of Israel to me:*
> *"Take this wine cup of fury from My hand,*
> *and cause all the nations,*
> *to whom I send you, to drink it.* (25:15 NKJV).

These passages, like that of Revelation 14:10, all remind us that there does come a time when God finally intervenes in the affairs of nations, and so it will be at the end of the world. The good news is that in no case does the totality of this judgment fall upon the righteous; only for those who have refused God's mercy. Now let's look at Isaiah 51 again.

Therefore please hear this, you afflicted,
And drunk but not with wine.
Thus says your Lord,
The LORD and your God,
Who pleads the cause of His people:
"See, I have taken out of your hand
The cup of trembling,
The dregs of the cup of My fury;
You shall no longer drink it. (Isa 51:21, 22 NKJV)

In this passage Isaiah speaks to those who have suffered in God's judgments, but who were not responsible for them, i.e. they were drunk with affliction, but not with wine. From these ones, the cup is taken away and they are spared the full mixture of God's wrath. Why? How does this happen? To understand that we need to go to Gethsemane. For we shall find the cup of wrath there too.

Following that last Passover supper He would spend with His disciples, Jesus led his trusting friends slowly up the Mount of Olives to where He often went to commune with the Father. But this time it was different, He knew that the next twenty-four hours were to be the most difficult of His life, more so indeed than any man had ever faced before, and that they were also to decide the destiny of humanity. Jesus was now entering the crossroads of history, the day of which the Messianic prophecies spoke; the event that the temple services and festivals pointed to. This was the day that type was to meet antitype. Whatever the outcome of the next twenty-four hours, the world would never be the same again.

As He made His way to His customary prayer spot, a great burden began to come over Him, a great sadness such as He had never before experienced. Already Judas was doing his doleful work, and His followers were soon to flee from Him and even deny they knew Him. Yes this was more than just the pending loss of His friends, it was combined with a sense of something He had not experienced before, a sense of unworthiness, shame, and guilt, as though heaven was turning its back on Him, like a child forlornly watching when its parents turn away in abandonment. The Redeemer staggered away to an isolated spot and fell to the ground crushed by the weight of what was happening to Him. The full horror of separation from the Father caused the capillaries in the sweat glands of His face to break down mingling

his sweat with his blood.[78] Jesus was drinking at the hand of the LORD the cup of His fury; He was drinking the dregs of the cup of trembling and draining it out. Three times He pled for mercy from the Father, *O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done.* Three times it was the Father's will for Him to drink it. This was the wine of the wrath of God, which is prepared unmixed in the cup of his anger.

We should not think this was an easy thing for the Father to do. But so great is God's love for us, that the godhead was willing to be rent asunder so that we will not be required to drink that bitter cup for ourselves.

> *"Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?*
> *Behold and see*
> *If there is any sorrow like my sorrow,*
> *Which has been brought on me,*
> *Which the LORD has inflicted*
> *In the day of His fierce anger.* (Lamentations 1:12)

T*ormented with fire and sulphur*
So, let's move on to the next part of the message, which concerns the punishment to come upon those who will receive it.

The threat of an ever-burning sulphurous hellfire as being the sinner's tortured existence for all eternity has long been the weapon of many a preacher seeking to hold his flock to order. What irreparable damage has been done to the lives of innocent people through this unfortunate doctrine? Yet Jesus used these words! Did He really intend that the wicked would consciously spend all eternity burning in a choking hellfire? Would a God who claims to love us really consign multitudes that have lived only seventy years or less to millions of years of unending torture? Yet the passage says this will happen in the presence of heaven. How will the redeemed enjoy spending eternity watching their lost loved ones suffer so? Something must be wrong here? Either God is a sadist, or we have misunderstood the doctrine. If He is a sadist why did He send His Son to die for us? Therefore we need to look deeper into this passage in order to understand it better.

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[78] Hematidrosis

The problem is the phrase, *forever and ever.* The allusion is to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, which were similarly destroyed, but are certainly not still burning today. The Apostle Peter, in 2 Peter 2:6, tells us that the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was an example of what would happen to the wicked – they would be burnt to ashes. Jude, in verse 7 of his letter, tells us that the people of Sodom and Gomorrah were an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire. Yet they obviously are not burning today. Thus there is a sense in which the idea of eternity is idiomatic implying 'as long as life lasts'.

This is further seen in other uses of the term *forever*. For example Isaiah 34:8-10 tells us that Edom will be destroyed with unquenchable fire, the smoke from which will rise forever. Yet, Isaiah goes on to say that wildlife will then proliferate there, which cannot happen while it is still burning.

Likewise, Exodus 21:6 tells us that a slave may serve his master forever. The NIV translates the word *forever* as *for life* because while the Hebrew uses the word *forever,* the intent is *for life.*

The more reasonable conclusion then, is that those who have the mark of the beast will die when the earth is destroyed by fire. The earth will burn only until all combustible material has been consumed. In a later passage in Revelation, we shall see that the earth will then rest for a period of 1000 years after which it will be recreated and populated with the redeemed. Those not saved will never share in this for they will no longer exist; this is the sense in which the punishment is forever. It is the punish*ment* that is forever, not the punish*ing*.

We are told that those who follow the beast will have no rest day or night. The Biblical concept of rest differs slightly from the way we understand it today. The imagery is pastoral, and may be seen in the tender care of the shepherd as he leads his flock into the safety of the sheepfold. No other image better illustrates God's rest than the sublime language of Psalm 23: *He restores my soul. He guides me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake…and I will dwell in Yahweh's house forever.* Thus God's rest may be seen as much in terms of a place of safety as a state of mind. When Christ said, *Come unto me all you who are heavy laden and I will give you rest* (Matthew 11:28), He was inviting his hearers not just to peace of mind, but to a place in His heavenly world. Likewise, the author of Hebrews in 4:1-11 urges his readers not to harden their hearts, as did the Jews in earlier days, but

to enter into God's rest. To follow Christ therefore, is to enter His rest, described here as a keeping of a sabbath of rest[79] for the people of God. *Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest,* he says.

Thus we see that those who have rejected Christ have no further opportunity to enter into the rest that God has offered them. What disappointment will be theirs when they see the redeemed receive their reward, and know that they can never share in it – forever and ever. They will experience the saddest words penned in the Bible: *The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved* (Jeremiah 8:20).

14-5 The Obedient Saints

Rev 14:12

> *Here is the perseverance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus."*

The bitter sadness of Jeremiah's words teaches a profound lesson. The deceptions of the beast are such that even "the very elect" could be taken in (Matthew 24:24). Many who have professed to be believers will not be saved. What will they have got wrong that they are not saved? There is such a multitude of belief systems whose adherents are all convinced that they and only they have truth. There are also those faiths that teach that it really doesn't matter what you believe because 'all roads lead to Rome'; just living a good life is all we need to do, they say. Yet Christ says to them, *depart from me, I never knew you* (Matthew 7:21-23). What was it about them that Christ did not know? It all boils down to one thing – they did not respect the Word of God. They either did not believe the Word, or they believed it, but did not follow what they knew to be true. Tough words these; but these three messages are tough and they are from Jesus.

Yet in reading the messages of the three angels we see they contain words almost guaranteed to arouse opposition - even ridicule. They seem to raise the issues we least want to discuss. Do these angels really ask us to believe the Biblical account of Creation? Is the hour of

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[79] The word *rest* used in Hebrews 4:9 is *Sabbatismos,* and is used only this one time in the Bible; possibly a word coined by the author.

judgment really upon us? Now we are told that that those who will endure this period are those who keep the commandments of God, and everyone knows that to keep the commandments is legalism. Isn't it?

Patient or steadfast endurance is what marks the saints during the trying end times. We saw in Revelation 12:17 that the beast specifically targets those who are identified as obedient to God's commandments and who hold their faith in Him. By the commandments we must understand more than just the Ten Commandments, for Jesus gave a broader meaning to the term 'commandment'. This means obedience to everything Jesus said and taught. As we have already seen, doing God's will is much more closely connected to loving God and neighbour than to cold compliance. Yet the Ten Commandments are a transcript of God's loving character, and Jesus repeatedly included them in His interpretation of the Law. Therefore we are right to see in these words the Ten Commandments.

Yet obedience is only half the picture. For the balanced Christian obedience alone is insufficient. The saints balance their obedience with a deep-seated trust in Christ as their Lord and Saviour, and live lives that reflect His love for God and man. Therefore the two aspects of this description, as in Revelation 12:17, deepen the meaning of what it is to be a true follower of Jesus; for obedience without faith is blind, and faith without obedience is dead.

14-6 The Second Beatitude

Rev 14:13

> *I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.'"*
> *"Yes," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors; for their works follow with them."*

This is the second of the beatitudes of Revelation; the first was in *Revelation 1:3.* The question that immediately springs to mind is, when does 'henceforth' commence? Obviously from the time the three angels commence their message. In that the days from the commencement of this message have seen a continual deterioration of the state of the world militarily, politically, socially, and now

environmentally, we must expect such a situation to continue until the time that Christ returns. Those who die in Christ at this time are blessed in that they are spared this trouble, and will awake, when it is over, to eternal life at the resurrection of the just. Their labours and their works are those that they have carried out as a part of the spreading of these messages.

At the time when Christ returns many of his faithful ones, who obey the commandments and have the faith of Jesus, will still be alive. These will have endured the bitterest tribulation, having been denied the most basic of human rights, the right to buy and sell. Like Elijah, who was fed by the ravens, so in these days God will provide miraculously for them. According to *Revelation 13:15*, the death sentence will have been placed upon these humble people, and they no doubt will be fugitives during the final days of earth's current history. Those who die prior to this will be mercifully spared these trying times.

The passage reminds us of the sublime words of the Apostle Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18: *For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with God's trumpet. The dead in Christ will rise first, then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. So we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore comfort one another with these words.*

14-7 The Harvest

Rev 14:14-20

> *I looked, and saw a white cloud, and on the cloud one sitting like a son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle.*
> *15 Another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him who sat on the cloud, "Send your sickle, and reap; for the hour to reap has come; for the harvest of the earth is ripe!"*
> *16 He who sat on the cloud thrust his sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped.*
> *17 Another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven. He also had a sharp sickle.*

18 Another angel came out from the altar, he who has power over fire, and he called with a great voice to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, "Send your sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for the earth's grapes are fully ripe!"
19 The angel thrust his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vintage of the earth, and threw it into the great wine press of the wrath of God.
20 The wine press was trodden outside of the city, and blood came out of the wine press, even to the bridles of the horses, as far as one thousand six hundred stadia.

The beautiful words of the Apostle Paul, quoted at the end of the previous section, fittingly bring us to the scene described above. For Chapter 14:14-20 brings to a thrilling climax the drama of the ages, as Christ comes to deliver His people. Matthew 24:26-31, Acts 1:10-11, 1Thessalonians 4:16-18 and Revelation 1:7 add further detail as to the glorious nature of this event which, we are told, will be so dramatic that the whole world will witness it.

The passage is rich in its imagery, likening the event to a harvest. Verses 15 and 16 suggest a grain harvest with the sickle being swung in great sweeps by Christ Himself. Yet verses 17-20 suggest a different instrument, used to remove grape clusters from the vine. This sickle appears not to be in the hands of Christ but of another angel.

The question is who is being harvested? The righteous or the wicked? Verses 15 and 16 remind us of Christ's parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:18-23) in which the harvest refers to those who have accepted the Word of God. Therefore these verses suggest the harvest of the righteous. Verses 17-20, on the other hand, reveal that the grapes are all placed into the winepress of God's wrath. Therefore they must refer to the unsaved. Christ has already taken upon Himself the cup of God's wrath on behalf of those who repented of their sins. But those who did not must drink it for themselves.

In fact the unsaved, as we shall see in Chapter 20:9, are not finally destroyed until after a one thousand year period. We are told here that they will finally be burned up, which may explain the involvement of the angel who had charge of the fire in Chapter 14:18.

At the return of Christ the righteous dead will be raised to eternal life, while those still alive when He comes will be taken up to be with Him.

This event marks the first resurrection. Also at this time the living unsaved will be destroyed and will remain dead until the events described in Chapter 20 at the end of a thousand-year period. At the end of the thousand years all the unsaved dead will be raised to face their judgment, which is described in Chapter 20:9-15. This is referred to as the second resurrection.

Thus there is a one-thousand year period between the first and second resurrections, and because the punishment of the unsaved is described here in Chapter 14, it is quite possible that verses 17-20 occur 1,000 years after verses 14-16. The reader may therefore ask, why the unsaved here are described in terms of grapes, while in Revelation 20 they are burned up. The answer is probably because God chooses His imagery to suit his purpose. Both passages use symbols used to describe events. Similarly Christ used different metaphors in describing Himself; He was the Rock, the Good Shepherd, a Bridegroom, the rejected Cornerstone, a Door to the sheepfold, and the true Vine; He was the Bread of life, the Light of the world, and the Water of life. The imagery used in this passage is that of the harvest, while the imagery of Chapter 20 is fire.

There is a simple way to understand the depth of the blood that flows from the winepress. When we reach Chapter 19 we shall see more clearly that the imagery used in describing the Second Advent of Christ is that of the winepress full of grapes to be made into wine. In Palestine, when making wine, the winemakers would tread the grapes in the winepress in order to extract the juice. As they did so their garments would become stained, especially around the hem. Thus when Christ descends from heaven with His holy cavalry, the horses will, as described in Isaiah 63:1-6, tread the winepress of God's anger, and as they do so the blood will stain them to the height of their bridles. Thus it is not necessary to picture a sea of blood two metres deep. As far as the area is concerned, 1600 stadia are 200 Roman miles, or about 184 modern miles (296 km), which is a little larger than the length of the Holy Land.

In both chapters the judgment upon the unsaved occurs outside the city. Joel 3:12-13 is alluded to in this passage for it not only describes the judgment of the nations at the Valley of Jehoshaphat, traditionally situated just outside Jerusalem, but also uses the harvest, winepress imagery. Likewise, Jesus Christ suffered outside the city. But perhaps there is no more fitting way of drawing to a close this section of the Book of Revelation than by allowing the author of the Book of Hebrews

to speak on this subject:*For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high priest as an offering for sin, are burned outside of the camp. Therefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people through his own blood, suffered outside of the gate. Let's therefore go out to him outside of the camp, bearing his reproach. For we don't have here an enduring city, but we seek that which is to come*.(Hebrews 13:11-14).

Chapter 15

15-1 The Sea of Glass Revisited

Rev 15:1-4

> *I saw another great and marvellous sign in the sky: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them God's wrath is finished.*
> *2 I saw something like a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who overcame the beast, his image, and the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God.*
> *3 They sang the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying,*
> *"Great and marvellous are your works, Lord God, the Almighty!*
> *Righteous and true are your ways, you King of the nations.*
> *4 Who wouldn't fear you, Lord,*
> *and glorify your name?*
> *For you only are holy.*
> *For all the nations will come and worship before you.*
> *For your righteous acts have been revealed."*

Chapter 15 is still a part of the fourth of John's seven visions of heaven. The chapter opens with John witnessing seven angels each one preparing to pour out a plague onto the earth. These angels are inside the heavenly temple, but in verse 6 John sees them leave the temple in preparation for their work of judgment on the earth.

Meanwhile the redeemed are seen by John standing on a vast glass-like structure which is obviously in heaven, but very possibly outside the temple. The sea of glass may be the antitype of the earthly temple laver, which in the Old Testament is often called a sea, and is for the purification of those involved in the temple services. It is logical to assume that these saints can see the seven angels, and know what they are about to do.

There is something familiar about this sea of glass. It reminds us of Chapter 4 and 5 where we saw the glorious scene of Christ's inauguration following His victorious ascension. The reader is urged to revisit those two chapters at this point, for there we saw the sea of

glass beside the throne of God along with the heavenly choirs singing the praises of the Lamb who had overcome evil.

This passage in a sense brings us back to that scene of praise and adoration, reminding us that it is Jesus Christ who is at the centre of our religion, our faith, and our lives. We saw how there was a progression in praise commencing with the four living creatures, and building up to a mighty crescendo as the entire universe joined the refrain. Now we see that the redeemed are also among that glorious number singing a song that only they can sing, the song of their deliverance from 'Egypt'.

We also saw this joyful band in *14-1 Following the Lamb,* for these are the same people described there as the 144,000 who are undefiled and follow the Lamb wherever He goes. We may ask what they are doing there seeing that Christ, at the point of time described here, has not returned to claim His own. We should remember that in the Book of Revelation, the righteous are always seen as inhabitants of heaven, while the unsaved are described as 'of the earth'. Those righteous who are living upon the earth during the last days, who will be alive when Christ returns, are described here as being in heaven. This is because they are citizens of God's kingdom, and as such are considered inhabitants of heaven.

We wish we could stay and learn more of this wonderful scene, but that is denied us for a few more chapters as our next view into heaven makes us look again at the judgment of those not so blessed as to be able to be among the joyful number.

15-2 The Temple Opened

Rev 15:5-8

> *After these things I looked, and the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened.*
> *6 The seven angels who had the seven plagues came out, clothed with pure, bright linen, and wearing golden sashes around their breasts.*
> *7 One of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever.*

> *8 The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from his power. No one was able to enter into the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels would be finished.*

Now for the fifth time John regards the heavenly temple. This time it is described as the Tabernacle of the Testimony, and it is opened as though for all to see inside. The word 'tabernacle' usually refers to the earthly sanctuary that was made of skins. However, in Numbers 17 the expression, Tabernacle of the Testimony, is used in conjunction with the budding of Aaron's rod. In Hebrews 9:4 we are informed that Aaron's rod was kept in the Ark of the Covenant along with a jar of manna and the Ten Commandments. These three items were placed in the Ark as a testimony, or witness to three fundamental aspects of God,

1) His authority (the rod),
2) His all-provision (the manna),
3) His perfect character (the commandments).

Thus there is a sense in which it is the Ark of the Covenant that is featured here even though it is not specifically referred to. The Ark of the Covenant was in the Most Holy Place of the temple, and was entered by the High Priest only one day per year on the Day of Atonement, or Judgment. We were told in 14:7 that t*he hour of His judgment has come*. Therefore the theme of Chapter 15 is the final judgments that are taking place upon the world and those who have rejected God's grace.

It is this aspect of the temple that forms the backdrop for the next section of Revelation, the seven plagues. Now we see seven angels bring seven plagues out of the temple. The dress of these angels with the sash across the chest reminds us of earlier descriptions of Christ as for example in Revelation 1:13. Is it possible that these angels are a representation of Christ as He emerges from before the Ark of the Covenant following His work there as High Priest?

It is one of the four living creatures which gives the angels the seven bowls full of God's wrath. We first met these beings in Revelation 4:6-8. We noted that both Ezekiel and John saw them in the temple by the throne, and that both men described them in terms of a man, a lion, an ox and an eagle. We noted that these beings probably symbolise attributes of Christ – wisdom, royalty, strength, omniscience. Thus in

this scene both the seven angels and the living being may all symbolise different aspects of Christ.

It is worthy of note that the three items in the Ark of the Covenant also are all types of Christ.

The Rod – Christ the High Priest in the Order of Melchizidek.
The Manna - Christ the Bread of eternal life.
The Decalogue – Christ the Perfect Man.

Hence again we see Jesus at the centre of this wonderful book; it is by Him and about Him; for He is everything, the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.

If indeed we have just witnessed Christ emerge from before the Ark of the Covenant, we have reached a deeply significant stage in the fate of humankind. For the righteous have been sealed with the name of God, and the unsaved have been marked with the name of the beast. When Christ leaves the Most Holy Place judgment has been completed, and there is now no further opportunity for salvation for the wicked. Therefore, when the seven last plagues come upon the earth, the fate of each person will have been decided, and those sad words of Jeremiah 8:20 will fall upon the lips of the lost: *The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.*

> *He who acts unjustly, let him act unjustly still. He who is filthy, let him be filthy still. He who is righteous, let him do righteousness still. He who is holy, let him be holy still* (Revelation 22:11-12).

Chapter 16

16-1 The Sore

Rev 16:1-2

> *I heard a loud voice out of the temple, saying to the seven angels, "Go and pour out the seven bowls of the wrath of God on the earth!"*
> *2 The first went, and poured out his bowl into the earth, and it became a harmful and evil sore on the people who had the mark of the beast, and who worshiped his image.*

It would appear that while the plagues affect the entire planet, only the unsaved are touched by the first one. It is as though the first plague is something physical in order to let the world know unequivocally that the time for the plagues, the time of God's judgment, has come.

How can a plague affect some and not others? Is it because the righteous are no longer on the earth, having been secretly raptured away, as taught by some? If that were the case verse 15, which pronounces a blessing upon those who faithfully await Christ's return, would not have been written. Is it that, like the children of Israel in Egypt, they will be spared the plagues by divine providence? One possible answer is that the lifestyle of the many of the unsaved may be responsible for this sore. Is it possible that the sore is, in some way, a direct result of disregard of God's moral law? The passage does not state specifically that all the unsaved will receive this sore, but its prevalence would need to be sufficiently widespread that it drew attention to the onset of the plagues. When we are dealing with events that are still future, it is worth remaining circumspect, for we do not yet have sufficient light on future events.

16-2 The Nature Plagues

Rev 16:3-9

> *The second angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became blood as of a dead man. Every living thing in the sea died.*

4 The third poured out his bowl into the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood.
5 I heard the angel of the waters saying, "You are righteous, who are and who were, O Holy One, because you have judged these things.
6 For they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink. They deserve this."
7 I heard the altar saying, "Yes, Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are your judgments."
8 The fourth poured out his bowl on the sun, and it was given to him to scorch men with fire.
9 People were scorched with great heat, and people blasphemed the name of God who has the power over these plagues. They didn't repent and give him glory.

The next three plagues are environmental, and no thinking reader can escape noticing the similarities between these plagues and what is already seen to be occurring upon the earth. This passage should be a wake-up call to the world that God is getting ready to intervene in the affairs of man, but as it was in the days of Noah (Matthew 24:37), and as it was in the days of Lot (Luke 17:28) we must fear that few will heed this solemn warning.

In glancing back through the Book of Revelation we notice an interesting progression of activity on the part of heaven. Firstly, in Revelation 6:8, we saw that the fourth 'horseman of the apocalypse', the pale horse whose riders were death and hell, had the power over a fourth part of the earth. Then in Revelation 8:7-12 we saw the Trumpets start to inflict measured damage upon the environment, so that a third of the vegetation, the sea and rivers, and the sun and moon were affected. In Chapter 16 the plagues will be seen to complete this work in that they fall upon the entirety of the vegetation, water, and sun. Thus we see a progression in the planet's deterioration until life finally becomes unsustainable.

The current effects of climate change would suggest that the plagues are not yet here. However, we would not be remiss to see what is happening today as a strong warning, not only to treat our planet better, but to look at our standing with God in the light of His moral code, the Ten Commandments. Many, especially in the wealthier nations, who today decry the state of the planet, have no such concerns for the moral degradation occurring around them. Yet God places a strong link

between the sending of the plagues and the moral character of men. In spite of the plagues, He says, men still refuse to repent and glorify Him.

The reader may also notice that the language of the plagues, like that of the Trumpets, alludes to the Creation. The difference is that the Book of Revelation refers to the days of Creation in a reverse order as though God is undoing His Creation prior to making it anew in Chapter 21. Let us take a moment to explore this.

The Genesis record commences: *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and empty. Darkness was on the surface of the deep.* The word 'deep' in the Greek version of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, is 'abyss' (*abussos*), the same word used in Revelation 20 for the bottomless pit. Thus the earth at the beginning of its existence is described as an abyss, just as it is at the end. The order in which God undertook His Creation is as follows:

Day 0. Abyss.
Day 1. Light.
Day 2. Atmosphere separated from water.
Day 3. Dry land divided from waters. Vegetation.
Day 4. Sun and moon.
Day 5. Marine life and birds.
Day 6. Animal and insect life. Human life. Herbage as food.
Day 7. God rests

As we consider the damage to the earth during the Trumpets and Plagues, we note the order as follows:

Trumpet 1.	Vegetation, One third affected.
Plague 1.	Sore
Trumpet 2.	Sea becomes blood. One third dies.
Plague 2.	Sea becomes blood. Everything in it dies.
Trumpet 3.	Rivers and lakes, one third become bitter
Plague 3.	Rivers and lakes become blood.
Trumpet 4.	Sun, moon and stars, one third darkened.
Plague 4.	Sun becomes super hot.
Trumpet 5.	Locusts torment the unrighteous
Plague 5.	Extreme torment on the beast.

Trumpet 6. An army from the Euphrates attacks the unrighteous.
Plague 6. Euphrates dries up.

Trumpet 7. Judgment commences.
Plague 7. Judgment commences

Placing the plagues alongside the days of Creation looks like this:

Day 0, Abyss = Rev. 20, 1000-year Abyss.
Day 1, Light formed = Plague 5, Darkness
Day 2, Air formed = Plague 7, poured into the air
Day 3, Waters separated = Plague 3, Waters to blood
Day 4, Sun/moon formed = Plague 4, Sun overheats
Day 5, Marine life formed = Plague 2, Marine life dies
Day 6, Animals/man formed = (Plagues 1 & 6 not paralleled)
Day 7 God rests

Although the order is not exactly reversed, we see a trend in the order of the plagues that suggests to us that God is gradually undoing His work. The question that someone might ask is: how far does God go in undoing His Creation? We must assume that God intends to remove all traces of sin from the earth before He makes it anew as described in Revelation 21. But what constitutes sin? Presumably the evidence of sinful man is found in more than our moral behaviour, but in the damage we have done to the planet. Indeed we have been poor stewards of this great gift of God. Now we have placed machines deep into space and have left our footprints on the moon. Even Mars has scrap metal littered on it, and millions of items of 'space junk' litter the solar system and even beyond[80]. Will God include these in His clean up, or will He leave them as a reminder of humankind's vain attempts to conquer the universe while yet sinners?

Given the extent that sinful man has encroached upon the universe, it is not surprising that God chooses fire to purify it. The Apostle Peter, looking into the future says, *…the elements will be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up…*(2 Peter 3:10-13). In this passage Peter also tells us that the heavens will also be burnt up. Ironically it is the results of our own exploitation of the planet that will provide much of the fuel God will use

[80] Voyager 1 exited the heliosphere in August 2012. Voyager 2 exited at a different location in November 2018. Source: https://voyager.jpl.nasa.gov/news/details.php?article_id=112

to ignite the fire. Perhaps it is those oil reserves still in the ground that will become the fuel tank. Is that what will provide the smoke of the earth's torment mentioned in Revelation 14:11?

It is at the time of Christ's return that God chooses to burn up the earth and the heavens. Then, according to Revelation 20, the earth will return to the abysmal state in which it was prior to the Creation. We shall look more deeply at this period in earth's history when we reach that chapter.

16-3 The Darkness

Rev 16:10-11

> *The fifth poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was darkened. They gnawed their tongues because of the pain,*
> *11 and they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores. They didn't repent of their works.*

As the fifth trumpet sounded upon those who did not have the seal of God, so the fifth plague falls upon the unsealed. As the fifth trumpet brought five months of intense agony from scorpion-like stings, so the recipients of the fifth plague gnaw their tongues with pain from the sores. Presumably the effects of the previous plagues are still experienced during subsequent ones.

This time it is upon the throne, or headquarters of the Beast, that this plague falls. This is the Beast of Revelation 13, which we saw to represent the religio-political amalgamation of Church and State behind the lamb-like beast that has taken control of peoples' allegiance. Exactly what form this plague takes we are not told except that there will be a great darkness. In that God is Light, and in the Creation God separated light from darkness, there is a sense in which this darkness could be spiritual as well as literal. As God's Spirit withdraws from humankind darkness is the result. Not just the darkness of the night, but a darkness that is so intense that those who experience it can feel it envelop them as a cloak of evil.

We saw this darkness during the plagues of Egypt, and are told in Exodus 10:21-23 that darkness so great 'that it could be felt' came over the land. This darkness was so terrifying that it persuaded Pharaoh finally to allow the Israelites to leave Egypt (even though he changed his mind later). Man cannot live without the Spirit of God, and when that Spirit is withdrawn the terror that comes is too much for him to bear, for the forces of evil have complete control of the land. Not one of the terrors of the Egyptian plagues was able to persuade Pharaoh until the coming of the darkness.

We also saw this darkness at Calvary when Christ took the sins of the world on His guiltless shoulders. It is hard to comprehend how Christ, the perfect Son of God, could become such a curse (Galatians 3:13) that God would withdraw His presence from His dear Son. *My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?* was the woeful lament from the cross that day, as the untainted Jesus, who had spent eternity as heaven's Commander, felt the desolation that came upon Him during those terrifying hours. For as God's Spirit left Him, the malevolent forces of Satan pressed around Him, and bereft of God's presence, the physical pain became as nothing in comparison with the terror of the darkness, and in that darkness He died. He who is hanged on a tree is cursed (Deuteronomy 21:23). Thus shall it be for the unsaved when the plagues fall upon the earth. *O Lord, what shall we do to be saved?*[81]

16-4 The Euphrates

Rev 16:12

> *The sixth poured out his bowl on the great river, the Euphrates. Its water was dried up, that the way might be prepared for the kings that come from the sunrise.*

As the sixth Trumpet saw the release of the four angels bound at the River Euphrates, now we see the same river completely dried up. What a temptation here to apply this literally! In that the river flows through both Turkey and Syria before reaching Iraq, and in that both these nations have built several dams on it, could evaporation and

[81] Acts 16:30. The reply? *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved, and your house.*

degradation result in the death of the river?[82] These ideas are possible, but we are always better to seek a Scriptural solution to a passage, seeking to know how John understood it. There is an allusion here to the overthrow of Babylon by Cyrus and Darius, the kings of the east, when, during Belshazzar's Feast, described in Daniel 5, Darius diverted the river so that his troops could enter the city via the dry riverbed. Thus it was the drying up of the Euphrates that caused the overthrow of Babylon.

We will see in Chapter 17 that Babylon is described as a prostitute who sits on many waters, and that the waters represent the people of the nations. Thus Babylon is a symbolic term as the literal Babylon no longer exists. We will look at this passage in more detail when we study Chapter 17, but in the meantime it becomes clear that the drying up of the Euphrates, while it may happen literally during the scorching heat of the fourth plague, primarily refers to the overthrow of that power that is spiritually described as Babylon. The Euphrates was what gave life to Babylon; when it dries up Babylon must die.

Especially significant to our understanding of these events is the reference to the kings from the East. Some Bible students see in this phrase a reference to nations such as China, believing that they will come from the East to play a part in the Battle of Armageddon. But it is to Scripture we always turn to understand Scripture. Other references to the East help us to understand this passage.

When the wise men arrived in Jerusalem looking for the Christ child, they said, *Where is he who is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and have come to worship him* (Matthew 2:2).

Thirty years later Jesus said of Himself, *For as the lightning flashes from the east, and is seen even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be.*(Matthew 24:27).

We read in Revelation 7:2, *I saw another angel ascend from the sunrise, having the seal of the living God. He cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was given to harm the earth and the sea…*

The kings from the East are in fact a reference to Christ, and as strange as it may seem, it is Cyrus who, when he dried up the

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[82] The large reservoirs behind the dams cause loss of water through evaporation. Irrigation water also runs back into the river carrying with it dissolved fertiliser chemicals.

Euphrates and entered Babylon, became a type of Christ. But more about that when we reach *18-2 Come Out of Her My People.*

16-5 The Three Frogs

Rev 16:13-14

> *I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits, something like frogs;*
> *14 for they are spirits of demons, performing signs; which go out to the kings of the whole inhabited earth, to gather them together for the war of that great day of God, the Almighty.*

Once again we find ourselves drawn back to the plagues of Egypt, for there a plague of frogs came over the land. This time however, there are only three, but these three frogs, creatures deemed unclean in Leviticus, have worldwide influence. Their role is to cover the entire world rallying the kings of the earth to do battle with the forces of God.

In Revelation 14 we saw three angels, whom we saw to be the faithful followers of Christ, preparing the way for the return of King Jesus with a solemn warning to worship God the Creator for the hour of His judgment had come. Now we see three unclean spirits, in gross counterfeit to the three angels, go out into the earth to prepare Christ's enemies to oppose God. We see then, a marshalling of the forces of good and evil for the great showdown, the great climax of earth's history – Armageddon.

Who are these spiritual cane toads? We are told they come out of the mouths of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet. Apart from vomit, what comes from the mouth? Words! It is the words of this unholy trinity that they represent. We met these three in Revelation 12 and 13. The dragon is Satan who vomits out a flood of water to try to drown God's people (12:9,15), the beast is the religious power who speaks great blasphemies against God (13:1), and the false prophet is the lamblike beast that gives the appearance of representing Christ, but teaches falsehood (13:11-14). We looked in detail at these beasts when we covered Chapter 13. Like the lamblike beast, these toads are able to deceive the nations with their miraculous signs.

It is a sad fact that we prefer to base our understanding of truth on a miracle rather than on solid study of the Word of God. We fail to realise, when we do that, that the Word of Truth cannot lie, but miracles can be quite easily brought about by deception. Just as the Egyptian officials were able to imitate Moses when his staff became a snake, so the lamblike beast will bring fire from heaven in imitation of Elijah. As did Pharaoh, so the nations will accept the deception and reject the witness of Moses and Elijah.

16-6 Blessed Is He

Rev 16:15

> *"Behold, I come like a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his clothes, so that he doesn't walk naked, and they see his shame."*

Why is this beatitude suddenly interjected at this point? It would have made more sense if verses 15 and 16 were reversed. There is such a sense of urgency in this verse, as though Christ cannot emphasise enough the magnitude of what is about to occur. These words will be of the greatest encouragement to the saints as they experience the wrath of the beast. For, as King Ahab called Elijah the 'troubler of Israel', and as Nero blamed the Christians for the burning of Rome, the beast will blame the saints for the ills that have come upon the world due to their refusal to worship him.

When Christ says he will come like a thief He could mean that he will sneak back to the world in the middle of the night so that nobody knows He has come, or He could mean that He will come at a time when we are least expecting Him and have made no preparations for His arrival. Which is it?

There are two other passages where the Second Advent is likened to a thief: The first is *Matthew 24:43-44* and is a part of the discourse in which Jesus talks about the end of the world and His return. Here He explains that if we knew what time the thief would come we would have made sure we were ready for him. He has just informed us that His

return will be as visible as lightning, so we know it is not the secrecy, but our unpreparedness that He is referring to.

The second reference is found in *2 Peter 3:10*. Peter here describes the end of the world as coming like a thief in the night with a big noise. Obviously this thief is not the stealthy type. He announces his arrival in Gestapo fashion, by kicking in the door and ransacking the house while the occupants sit quaking in their beds.

It is imperative to understand this point, because popular theology today teaches the very thing that Christ warned against in Matthew 24. We mentioned it in Chapter *6-7 The Sixth Seal*, but its importance merits its repetition. Popular futurist theology teaches that seven years prior to the return of Christ, He will secretly rapture the righteous away so that they will not be on the earth during the final events of earth's history. However, a careful reading of Matthew 24 reveals that for three reasons this is not the case: Firstly, verse 22 tells us that the tribulation will be shortened in order to spare the 'elect' who otherwise would not survive what is to come upon the planet. Secondly, verses 29-31 tell us that immediately following the tribulation Christ will return and gather the righteous from the four winds of heaven (we saw in *7-1 The Four Winds* that the four winds of heaven mean the four points of the compass - therefore the righteous must still be on the earth). Thirdly, verse 39 tells us that it is the wicked that are taken away (in death), not the righteous.

The great danger in this doctrine is that not only does it set a date for Christ's return seven years after thousands of godly people supposedly disappear, but it de-emphasises the glorious event that is the blessed hope of the New Testament writers, the second coming of Christ and the resurrection that occurs at that time. In emphasising a secret rapture seven years before that event, Dispensationalism turns people's attention away from Christ's return, and at the same time devalues the second advent for non-believers, who can now relax knowing they have seven years to 'get right with God'. Not only that, but those saints who waited to be raptured now suddenly find themselves suffering the tribulation they hoped to avoid. Will they be able to stand through such a trial?

One other aspect of this vitally important issue must be explored. A look at Biblical history shows that God does not remove His people from the trials of life; rather he guides them through them. Just as Noah was not saved from the Flood, he was saved in the Flood. Just

as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were not saved from the fiery furnace, they were saved in it. Just as Daniel was not saved from the lion's den, he was saved in it. So God's people will be protected during the last great tribulation, but will not be removed from it. God does not save us *from* trials; He saves us *in* trials.

Similarly, Christ warned His followers that when they saw the Roman armies surrounding Jerusalem, they should flee the city. He did not assure them that He would arrange for their removal from the city prior to the invasion. The onus was upon them to be vigilant, and to live by faith in His Word. So today, God's people must be alert to the signs of the times and be ready to arrange their lives so as to minimise the suffering they will experience. When they see legislation being enacted by the lamblike beast, the religious power that purports to act in the name of Christ, forcing them to disregard the Commandments of God, especially the Fourth Commandment, which specifically concerns their worship, they will know it is time to flee the major population centres of the world. They will not wait for the appearance of the sore, for by that time it will be too late.

Thus our passage under consideration, Revelation 16:15, includes this very warning at this time because the 'elect' will still be upon the earth during these trying times. During this time they are admonished to sleep with their clothes on so that they are ready for Christ to return at any time.

16-7 Armageddon

Rev 16:16

> *He gathered them together into the place which is called in Hebrew, "Megiddo".*

Where is Armageddon? It is originally a Hebrew word, and the closest Biblical equivalent that can be found is *Har Megiddo*, the Mountain of Megiddo, or possibly *Ir Megiddo,* the City of Megiddo. This name is mentioned eleven times in the Old Testament, and does not appear to have any immediate significance. King Josiah was killed there when fighting the Egyptians (2 Chronicles 35:22-24). The valley referred to in this passage is not large enough to become a battleground of the

magnitude described in the Book of Revelation. So while many people do look for a literal Battle of Armageddon fought between nations of this world, it is unlikely that it could be fought in the Valley of Megiddo.

Why does John refer to it specifically as a Hebrew word? If he was referring to Megiddo, why did he not say so? Once again we find ourselves asking if this is to be understood literally or figuratively, and coming to the conclusion that Armageddon is a spiritual battle rather than a literal one.

A question that needs to be asked here is: who are the protagonists in this great battle? Are the kings of the earth meeting to fight one another? Or are they all joining forces in opposition to a common foe? Chapter 16 gives tantalisingly little information about this battle, but just informs us that it is to occur on the great day of God Almighty. What we do know therefore is that it will be the climax to earth's history as we know it today, and will culminate in the overthrow of all those entities that have aligned themselves against Jesus Christ and His followers. Therefore, it appears that this is the ultimate good versus evil battle at which the dragon, the beasts of Chapter 13, the three frogs, and all those who have given their allegiance to them, will face the forces of Truth, Justice and Righteousness, and the world will never be the same again.

16-8 The Seventh Plague

Rev 16:17-21

> *The seventh poured out his bowl into the air. A loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, "It is done!"*
> *18 There were lightnings, sounds, and thunders; and there was a great earthquake, such as has not happened since there were men on the earth, so great an earthquake, and so mighty.*
> *19 The great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. Babylon the great was remembered in the sight of God, to give to her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath.*

> *20 Every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.*
> *21 Great hailstones, about the weight of a talent, came down out of the sky on people. People blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, for this plague is exceedingly severe.*

Whereas the earlier plagues were somewhat localised, this one is poured into the air from where it spreads to the four winds of the earth. The entire planet is involved as the climax of earth's history is reached, and the angels holding back the four winds release them to do God's strange work (*Isaiah 28:21*).

The words, *It is done*, remind us of the words of Christ from the cross, *It is finished*. What is *done*? At Calvary it was the Plan of Salvation that was brought to fulfilment; the promise of Genesis 3:15 had been repeated daily in the temple by the offering of the sacrificial lamb. Now the promise had been fulfilled, and the Lamb of God was sacrificed as a perpetual offering for the sins of humankind from Adam until the last sin to be committed on the earth.

While Calvary became the great Antitype of the Passover, the events of the seventh plague bring to fulfilment the events of the Day of Atonement, the great Day of Judgment. Now the world's cup of iniquity is full, and the time has come for Christ the High Priest to put on the crown of the King of Kings; for the Lamb of God to become Michael the Commander of the heavenly forces.

The description of His march into battle is found in Revelation 19:11-16, and it is this chapter that completes the unfinished picture of Armageddon. Thus the reason we are not given a description of the Battle of Armageddon in Chapter 16 is because we are still being shown the events leading up to the battle. Like a Shakespearean play we walk through the two camps as they make preparations, and hear their conversation. On the one side are the beasts of Chapter 13 leading the nations of the earth under the banner of the dragon. On the other is a frail looking army of those who have made obedience to Christ their paramount purpose. This feeble looking company appears to be no match for the wrathful dragon and his multitudes, but over them, and unseen by them, there stands the banner of Jesus Christ and all the mighty host of heaven.

We wonder how this small faithful band can withstand the power of the dragon, but an angel takes John aside and gives him a sneak preview of the fate of the beasts in Chapters 17 and 18. Here John sees the falling apart of all the dragon's plans to conquer the world as one thing after another goes wrong. Here he sees the agencies the dragon has used of the past centuries collapse as the people of the world experience the effects of the seventh plague, and as they learn that they were deceived.

So now, in Chapter 16, we see the beginning of the frustration of the dragon's plans as a great earthquake, greater than any earthquake the world has ever seen, rocks Babylon. The damage to the earth is so great that it alters the map of the world. Following the earthquake great hailstones fall from heaven, larger than any that have ever been experienced. These events may well be both symbolic and literal. For Christ told us in Matthew 24 that great earthquakes would occur in the last days, and we are fully aware of the likelihood of the major fault lines of the earth giving way. We know for certain that 'The Big One' must occur sooner or later. However, it is quite possible that because Babylon is a symbolic entity, the earthquake is metaphorical way of saying that the events described here will shake it to its very core.

We will have noted some connection between the ten plagues of Egypt and the seven last plagues. Waters turned to blood, frogs, hail, sores; all suggest we should look for a connection. Why ten plagues upon unrepentant Egypt, and seven for the unrepentant world of the last days? The most likely answer is that the first three of Egypt's plagues fell upon the whole land including Goshen where the Israelites lived. This means they would have experienced a degree of suffering, but not the worst of it. Beginning with Egypt's fourth plague we read that the plagues did not extend to the land of Goshen; only to the land of Egypt. This suggests the seven last plages will not fall upon God's people, for they have already experienced great suffering at the hands of the unsaved. These plagues will probably be of reasonable short duration, for humanity will not be able to survive them for too long.

Chapter 17

17-1 The Woman of the Waters - 1

Rev 17:1-2

> *And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters:*
> *[2]With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication.* (KJV)

The symbolism of this passage is strikingly direct. The angel who speaks to John here seems to be one who does not mince his words. The discreet preacher would not wish to embarrass the genteel members of his or her congregation with such words lest they become the topic of conversation at the table following the service.

So who is the woman of such ill repute? We saw in *2-5 Thyatira* and in *12-1 The First Woman on the Moon* that throughout the book of Revelation, and indeed throughout the Scriptures, gender relationships are used to describe God's dealings with mankind. We saw that *Genesis 3:15* first introduces us to that idea, and that the Old Testament writers continue it in such passages as Jeremiah 6:2, *I have likened the daughter of Zion to a comely and delicate woman* (KJV). We understood then that the woman of Chapter 12 represented the church, or the faithful followers, of God. The reader may wish to glance again at *12-1 The First Woman on the Moon* to refresh the memory. Based on this premise, it is safe to say then, that an immoral woman represents an idolatrous church, or those who worship gods other than the God of the Bible. Let us see if subsequent passages support this interpretation.

17-2 The Woman of the Waters - 2

Rev 17:3-6

He carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness. I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet-coloured beast, full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns.
4 The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of the sexual immorality of the earth.
5 And on her forehead a name was written, "MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF THE PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH."
6 I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. When I saw her, I wondered with great amazement.

There are three elements to this passage, the wilderness, the woman, and the beast. Firstly the wilderness:

In *12-4, The Woman Sheltered*, we saw a virtuous woman led into the wilderness for her protection against the dragon, Satan. Now we have a corrupt woman riding a terrifying beast in a wilderness. Is this the same wilderness, or a different one? If the same, i.e.those parts of the worlds that provided protection for those who sought to live by the Scriptures, then the pure woman representing the pure church has morphed into something despicable. If not, what other parts of the globe might be represented by a wilderness? In these days of globalisation and overpopulation, there are no other contenders except perhaps potentially Antarctica or the moon. But if this is the same wilderness, what happened to the Church? If it isn't the same wilderness, why would they be in a wilderness at all? Therefore, the only solution is that described in *3-1 Sardis*. Somehow, incredibly, the pure Church that fled the persecution of Europe, by the time of the end, has become the seat of the world's persecution of God's people. Obviously the wilderness is no longer a wilderness, because now the great whore sits upon 'many waters' (verse 1). If America was a part of the wilderness of Chapter 12, then America will become a part of the many waters of Chapter 17, and the inhabitants of the whole world, the unsaved that is, will fall under the spell of the great whore.

Secondly the woman: We are given further description of the woman here and are told that she sits on a red-coloured beast that has seven heads and ten horns; she dresses in red and purple, and is obviously very wealthy. In her hand is a cup full of items normally obtained from a

sex-shop, which fortunately are not identified by John (although his straight-talking angel might have told us). Furthermore we are told that she is drunk with the blood of the saints – those whom she has put to death for their loyalty to the Word of God.

There is much in this passage to show who she is and who she isn't. The target of her hatred is those who do not worship her, which confirms her identity as a religious power and not a political entity. Neither is she, as some contend, the European Union, for that body has not set itself up to be worshipped, at least not as of this writing.[83] However, there is little doubt, from the text of Revelation 18, that she will have an influence over the major international governmental and non-governmental organisations. The seven heads and ten horns on the animal that carries her we have seen before in Revelation 13:1 (see comment there).

We have identified this woman as a religious system, but here, and in verse 18, we are told that the woman is a city that reigns over the nations. Is this a contradiction? No, because Babylon, her name, is the city that originated, and now represents, false worship. We saw in *14-2 The Second Angel's Message* that there are two cities in the Book of Revelation: Jerusalem being the city of God, and Babylon being the city of Satan.

This passage therefore informs us that the woman, and the city whose name she bears, has a system of worship that is so widespread that it not only holds sway over the earth's inhabitants, but also rules over the world's leaders. We have already seen that the religion that emerged out of the Roman Empire is the only system of worship that meets all the criteria mentioned in this chapter.

We have learned from Revelation 13:11-17 that it will be the beast that comes from the earth that will be the one that acts on behalf of the first beast in controlling and dictating the worship of the people (see *13-2 The Beast from the Earth*). Thus this corrupt woman is more than just a denomination, she will direct a worldwide religious alliance that places the Law of God at nought, and will be so powerful that it will hold sway

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83 The European Union has taken as un unofficial symbol of Europe the mythical Europa being kidnapped by the god Zeus in the form of a bull. This has led some Christians to identify the EU as the Antichrist. There is a small problem here in that the Greek word for 'beast', *therion,* is not used of domestic animals which are referred to as *zöa.* Thus the 'EU' woman sits on a *zoon, not* a *therion* while the woman of Revelation 17 sits on a *therion,* not a *zöon.*

over not only the world's religions, but the world's political leaders. Its power will derive from its ability to do miracles supposedly from God, but which will not be in harmony with the simple Gospel truths of Scripture.

However, the sensitive student of Scripture will note that in Revelation Chapter 18 God pleads with His people to come out of Babylon. There are many people within this system that faithfully live before God in the light they have received. They are as much God's children as those who have received much greater light, and we must be ever sensitive to the presence of these wonderfully committed saints within Babylon. There will come a time when the issues will become clear enough for many of these honest people to clearly discern truth from error, and joyfully leave the walls of Babylon.

17-3 The Beast Explained

Rev 17:7-8

> *The angel said to me, "Why do you wonder? I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns.*
> *8 The beast that you saw was, and is not; and is about to come up out of the abyss and to go into destruction. Those who dwell on the earth and whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will marvel when they see that the beast was, and is not, and shall be present.*

In *17 - 2* we introduced three elements that make up Chapter 17; the wilderness, the woman, and the beast. Now we turn our attention to the beast upon which the woman sits. While John, perhaps because he is a man, gives much detail to his description of the woman, and glosses over the thing she sits on, the angel, perhaps because he is an angel, gives almost the entire remainder of the chapter to explaining the beast, while the woman gets barely a mention.

The passage provides an explanation for many of the symbols used in Revelation, and it is important that we spend some time in understanding them. Symbols normally remain constant throughout the Books of Daniel and Revelation so that a meaning given here can be

applied throughout these books. For example in Revelation 1:20 we were told that stars represent angels. Thus when the red dragon falls to the earth, as in Revelation 12:4, taking one third of the stars with him, we would not be remiss in understanding these to mean fallen angels.

We have run across a number of beasts now, and it would be in our interest to look at them in order to establish how they relate to one another. So far we can list them as follows:

1. Revelation 4:7 (KJV). The four beasts surrounding God's throne should really be described as 'living creatures' because the Greek of the New Testament, *zōa*, means 'animals', and is used to describe domestic and other animals we are familiar with.

2. Revelation 11:7. The beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit and puts to death the two witnesses. This beast must be Satan who is also the angel of the bottomless pit, Apollyon, as named in Revelation 9:11.

3. Revelation 13:1. The beast with seven heads and ten horns that arises out of the sea. This we identified as the religious institution that grew out of the embers of the Roman Empire and exerts control over the earth in the last days.

4. Revelation 13:11. The beast with lamb's horns that speaks like a dragon and arises out of the earth. This we identified as an alliance between church and state that, while appearing Christ-like on the surface, will be responsible for bringing about legislation concerning worship not in harmony with the Ten Commandments of God. The most likely scenario is that under the pretext of strengthening the family unit, laws will be passed regarding the observance of how and when we worship.

5. Revelation 17:3. The beast upon which the woman sits. This beast, like that of 13:1, also has seven heads and ten horns. They allude to the four beasts of Daniel Chapter 7, which have a total of seven heads and ten horns. Daniel's beasts represent the four world empires, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. Therefore it is consistent to understand the 'many waters' of 17:1 as the nations of the earth as they were at the time of John.

Yet there is more to this beast than Daniel 7; its body is covered in blasphemous graffiti as was the beast of 13:1, and its colour is red, presumably signifying blood. Of Daniel's four beasts, it was the fourth that was the most ferocious, and the fourth that had the ten horns. This beast also grew another horn that outgrew the ten and became a great persecutor of God's people. By comparing the beast and its rider of Revelation 17 to the horn power of Daniel 7 we can clearly see that the beast of Revelation 17 represents the amalgamation of church and state that will jointly seek to wipe God's people from the earth. The beast is the state, the rider is the church. Thus according to Revelation 17, there will come a time when church and state will unite as they did during the 1260 years of papal power, and once again, for a short but bitter time, God's people will be the object of special hatred by the world.

What is not so clear is why we are told that he was once, now is not, and again will be. There has obviously not been a time since Satan's rebellion that he has not been active. There was a time however, when the persecuting religious system that he supports was not active. Since 1798 when the Pope was taken prisoner, the church has demonstrated none of its character as a persecutor. But the words of the angel to John indicate that there will again come a time when this side of its character will emerge again. Revelation 13 though, suggests that it will not be directly involved in such tactics, but that the religio-political beast, presumably a union of states under the authority of the church will do that on its behalf.

This section should not be concluded without noting the reference to the Book of Life. We have seen it mentioned a few times, notable in *3-1 Sardis*, where those who overcame were to have their names remain there. There is a hint found when comparing the Scriptural references to the Book of Life, that we cannot do anything to have our name written there, rather it is what we do that causes our name to be removed. In the passage under consideration we are told that the book has existed since the foundation of the world. In Exodus 32:32-33 we read that Moses knew his name to be written in it. Thus the Book of Life must have existed since the inception of the Plan of Salvation.

What is ambiguous is when the names are placed there. Are they in the Book from the foundation of the world? Are they added when we are born (or when we are conceived)? Or are they added when we become citizens of heaven's kingdom? The text just says that the names of the

unsaved are not written in the book, but it does not say if they were ever there, or were removed.

If our names are there at the beginning of our lives, then that would give support to the belief that all people are saved until they have unconfessed sin which causes the removal of their name from the Book. This would mean that we are all born saved, but are lost by our unconfessed sins. On the other hand, if our names are added at a later point in our lives, that could mean we are born lost, and only saved when our names are entered into the book.

Which view is correct? There are arguments both ways. If the former view is correct, then all those who die early in life, or maybe even before birth, will be saved. That is good news indeed, especially for those who have lost little ones. Yet while this may work for infants, it means that salvation is separated from the need to be born again (John 3:3-7), and the urgency of preaching the Gospel is thus lessened. In fact this subject can lead to serious theological debate which is outside the scope of this book. The Plan of Salvation continues to be a great mystery for us (1 Timothy 3:14), but we do know that God is fair and just, and even though we now have only a dim vision of heavenly things, we can be fully confident that the day will come when God's justice will be fully vindicated.

17-4 The Seven Heads

Rev 17:9-11

> *Here is the mind that has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits.*
> *10 They are seven kings. Five have fallen, the one is, the other has not yet come. When he comes, he must continue a little while.*
> *11 The beast that was, and is not, is himself also an eighth, and is of the seven; and he goes to destruction.*

The Seven Kings
The woman, i.e. the church, sits on seven mountains. It is Rome that is known as the seven-hilled city, yet these seven mountains appear to be seven kingdoms and not specifically Rome.

Five Are Fallen

The angel was certainly right when he said understanding this section requires wisdom; for with the knowledge we have gained to date it would seem a fairly straightforward exercise to identify these kings. But it is not. The difficulty is that we are not sure where John is in terms of place and time. We can assume John was physically on the Island of Patmos, but 17:3 tells us he was carried away 'in the Spirit' to the wilderness. We have tried to ascertain if this is the same wilderness as in 12:6, 14, which we understand to be those parts of the world to which God's people would find a sanctuary from persecution; places such as the Waldensian valleys, the isles and the glens of Scotland, and other quiet lands including, in the latter part of the 1260 years, a new land that was to become the world's great haven for political and religious freedom, the United States of America.

The best way to answer these questions is to follow the principles of biblical interpretation and let Scripture interpret Scripture. The beasts of Daniel 7, Revelation 13:1 and 17:3 all have seven heads and ten horns. In Daniel 7 they are clearly identified as Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. The beast of Revelation 13:1 is clearly a composite of the beasts of Daniel 7, therefore it is correct hermeneutically to apply the same interpretation to the beast of Revelation 17. Hence, we are safest to understand the five fallen as Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Imperial Rome, and Ecclesiastical Rome. By this we must understand John to be in a vision of the time of the end some time after the close of the 1260 years.

The One Is

But who is this sixth king? The close of the 1260 years coincided with a change in the affairs of Europe - especially was this the case in France which underwent a revolutionary rejection of religion, and introduction of Reason as the philosophy of the State. From this time onwards, with the exception of the great missionary movement during the time of the empirical expansion of Britain, there was a cooling of religious fervour which has continued until this day. The Roman Church lost its political power; the Reformation lost its zeal; scientific discoveries led to distrust of the Scriptures; geology and the widespread acceptance of Evolution turned away long-held beliefs of Biblical Creationism; Marxist ideology and modern Spiritualism became widely popular. The globalisation of the twentieth-Century has resulted in a melting pot of religious belief similar to that which took place in the Roman Empire at the time of the

birth of Christ.[84] Perhaps then, the sixth king, the king that "now is" is the time in which we now find ourselves. What shall we call it, the king of godless secularism, a compound of Marxism, Capitalism, Spiritualism, Hedonism, Scientism, Humanism and any other ism that happens to take our fancy, in which the Scriptures are considered dead amid global postmodernist thought. This must be the sixth king.

But there is another king yet to come!

One is to Come

Hence we can say with some confidence that the sixth king *'is'* from the time the deadly wound is inflicted (13:3) until the time the wound is healed and once again a religio-political alliance again assumes power, which controls peoples' lives and worship patterns.

Therefore a scenario for the end times may well look like this: The world's social, military, and environmental situation will deteriorate to the point that the people will see their only solution as a being a return to religious values and practices. Then a world-wide authority will introduce laws regarding our worship, and all will be expected to give allegiance to this religio-political alliance, the seventh king. Satan, no doubt as the eighth king who has been behind all seven, will impersonate Christ at this time, and stage a glorious arrival on the scene as an angel of light, performing great miracles and bringing solutions to the impossible situations facing the world at that time. By using gentle words and talking of love, he will deceive the world into thinking the saviour of the world has arrived, not only as the Messiah, but also as the long-expected saviour of many other faiths. No doubt he will instruct the world's leaders that to bring about an end to the tribulation, and peace to the world, they must enforce the laws upholding the worship of the beast and its image. Those who note the conflict between this worship and the Law of God and refuse to comply will, as was Elijah of old, be branded as 'troublers of Israel', and the cause of the world's ills (see 1 Kings 18:17-18).

For their sake, Christ will cut short this terrible time, and as He promised, will return in great power and glory, to usher in the kingdom established from the foundation of the world. The woman, her mount, and all that is abominable will be destroyed in that day.

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[84] John Henry Merle D'Aubigne, *History of the Reformation in the Sixteenth Century,* Volume 1, Chapter 1.

The sadness is that so many will have been deceived by these kings. Unfortunately, being deceived is not an excuse for not following truth. Eve's sin was not overlooked because she was deceived. Today is our opportunity to study the Word of God for ourselves. We should not believe everything we are told (including this book) without deep prayerful study of the Scriptures to see if they are correct. For as the Apostle Paul says in Acts 17:11, the noble thing to do is to put everything we hear to the test. No doctrine should be accepted without careful confirmation of its accuracy against the Scriptures.

In greatest danger are those who believe what their preachers tell them because they believe their leaders to have special prophetic understanding. A well-educated man recently told a friend of the writer that he did not understand all his church's doctrines, but that they must be right because the elders, whom he believed to be prophets, said so. When our eternal salvation is at stake, we cannot risk not studying for ourselves everything we hear to see if it is in harmony with the Bible. How truly the angel spoke when he said we needed wisdom to understand these words. Understanding does not come except by prayer and deep study of God's Word comparing Scripture with Scripture.

17-5 The Horns Explained

Rev 17:12-17

> *The ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour.*
> *13 These have one mind, and they give their power and authority to the beast.*
> *14 These will war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings, and those who are with him are called chosen and faithful."*
> *15 He said to me, "The waters which you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and languages.*
> *16 The ten horns which you saw, and the beast, these will hate the prostitute, will make her desolate, will strip her naked, will eat her flesh, and will burn her utterly with fire.*

> *17 For God has put in their hearts to do what he has in mind, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God should be accomplished.*

The next few verses are fortunately a little easier to understand. The ten horns are ten kings that have not yet arisen, so we cannot know exactly who they are. When they do arise, they will give their total allegiance to the religio-political trinity of Revelation 13, the two beasts and the image to the beast.

We have seen other references to ten horns in Daniel 7:24, Revelation 12:3, and 13:1. These may not be exactly the same horns as they appear to be future. We might surmise that as conditions deteriorate a world government will be established with the globe divided into ten zones, each with its own 'king'. They rule only for 'one hour', meaning a very short period of time. If prophetic time is intended, then one hour would be two weeks. These ten kings will represent the State, but will take their cue from the Church. They are persuaded to join forces with the alliance in opposing the Lamb of God, but too late realise that they have backed the wrong horse. In their anger they will turn on the Church and ironically give her the treatment she has meted out to millions of 'heretics' over the centuries, they burn her. We are told they then transfer their allegiance from the woman to the power behind both Church and State, Satan, possibly at the time he stands up as the eighth king. Satan then takes over control of the world and rules it as he has wanted to ever since his first rebellion in heaven.
Yet this will be to him as nothing while Mordecai sits at the King's gate.[85] His full hatred is then directed at the humble few who have refused to bow before him as he passes. One shudders at the thought of how difficult this time will be for God's children, but praise God, we know that the gallows prepared for them will be used for another purpose, and that the edict passed against them will never be implemented, for Christ will return to save them.

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85 Esther 5:13. We have already noted in *12-3 Heavenly Warfare* how the story of Esther is a type of the conflict between good and evil. A careful reading of this wonderful little book reveals much about the nature of this conflict as we see Haman's wrath against a people whose laws differ from the rest of the world (3:8). While outside the scope of this book, the reader is recommended to search the book of Esther thoroughly for its allegorical content.

17-6 The Woman Explained

Rev 17:18

> *The woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth."*

Finally we are informed that the woman is the great city who rules over the earth. We saw that city to be spiritual Babylon in contrast to spiritual Jerusalem, the city of God. The mélange of symbols has required us to do some sorting out in order to understand better their meanings. We see that the woman sits: on many waters (v1), representing many peoples (v15), on a beast (v3) and on the seven heads (v9).

One way to coordinate these images is to picture the beast standing in, or emerging from, a large body of water just as do the beasts of Daniel 7 and Revelation 13:1. The brute is large enough for the woman to sit, not upon its back, but upon its heads, or one of them, controlling it as one might imagine an Asian farmer working his elephant. Yet like a rogue elephant, she does not really control the creature; it goes where it wills, for it is the beast that rises out of the abyss like some Hollywood Jurassic marauder to force its will upon the earth.

As with the Hollywood creature, which ultimately meets its match in some unlikely hero who is able to bring it down, so we shall see in succeeding chapters how a Lamb will ultimately bring this monster, along with all its retinue, to its knees.

Chapter 18

18-1 Let there be Light

Rev 18:1-3

> *After these things, I saw another angel coming down out of the sky, having great authority. The earth was illuminated with his glory.*
> *2 He cried with a mighty voice, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, and she has become a habitation of demons, a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird!*
> *3 For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her sexual immorality, the kings of the earth committed sexual immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from the abundance of her luxury."*

The angel of this chapter is more than a messenger, for He is a source of great light, and carries great authority. Surely this is Christ Himself, the Light of the world. Christ, however, is also the Word of God, and as such this messenger also represents the Gospel, which has brought light to the world wherever it has gone. His words are the same as those of the second angel of Revelation 14:8, and are a repetition of the last great message to the world before the end comes. That message, we saw to have been delivered by God's people as they preach the truth of the Word of God to the entire world. Thus there is a unity between Christ, His Word, and those who spread His Word as though they are one.

Isaiah said, *The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. The light has shined on those who lived in the land of the shadow of death* (Isaiah 9:2). John tells us in John 1:5 that *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness hasn't overcome it.* How well are these words fulfilled, for spiritual confusion has brought great darkness to the world. From the days of Nimrod, who founded the religion of ancient Babylon, until the time of the end, a counterfeit belief system has held the world in great darkness. Throughout the centuries since Christ came, the Word of God was kept from the people so that they believed fables and superstitions. When, with the Reformation, the Bible was finally released from its dungeon and given to the world, another story was presented in its place that has made the Bible appear to be myth

and fable. Today, thanks to the doctrine of the survival of the fittest, the spiritual darkness continues. No wonder Jesus said, *when the Son of man comes, shall he find faith on the earth?* (Luke 18:8).

As when Christ graced the land of Palestine by walking upon it, the light He brought was rejected by the people who preferred the darkness. But Truth does not remain hidden forever, and this angel illuminates the world with His presence. The light is the light of the Gospel, which is spread from one corner of the earth to the other. Millions around the world, in lands that have lived in great poverty and oppression, gladly receive the good news of salvation, while those who have previously received light slide into moral and spiritual decay, putting their trust in scientism, eastern mysticism, and self-styled gurus who teach them to look within themselves for their salvation.

18-2 Come Out of Her, My People

Rev 18:4-10

> *I heard another voice from heaven, saying, "Come out of her, my people, that you have no participation in her sins, and that you don't receive of her plagues,*
> *5 for her sins have reached to the sky, and God has remembered her iniquities.*
> *6 Return to her just as she returned, and repay her double as she did, and according to her works. In the cup which she mixed, mix to her double.*
> *7 However much she glorified herself, and grew wanton, so much give her of torment and mourning. For she says in her heart, 'I sit a queen, and am no widow, and will in no way see mourning.'*
> *8 Therefore in one day her plagues will come: death, mourning, and famine; and she will be utterly burned with fire; for the Lord God who has judged her is strong.*
> *9 The kings of the earth who committed sexual immorality and lived wantonly with her will weep and wail over her, when they look at the smoke of her burning,*
> *10 standing far away for the fear of her torment, saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! For your judgment has come in one hour.'*

We have already referred to this passage whenever we have needed to remind ourselves that the beasts represent a religious system, rather than people or churches. The Jews had been taken to Babylon as captives with the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC. Yet God did not intend them to stay there forever. There was a time when He would call them out to return and rebuild Jerusalem and its temple. So now God calls His spiritual Israelites from Babylon to once again take up residence in 'Jerusalem' and worship Him there.

We are told in verse 8 that the plagues will all come upon Babylon in one day, and in verse 10 they come upon her in one hour. We saw in *17-5 The Horns Explained* that the ten horns, or kings, were to rule only for one hour with the beast. Now we know why – because they amalgamated with the beast only a very short time before its overthrow. They obviously did not foresee this event when they entered the partnership. Therefore the demise of the beast is overwhelmingly sudden and unexpected. One day all is as normal; the next everything has changed. Isaiah, using the words alluded to in this passage, foretold that when the City of Babylon fell it would happen suddenly and without warning: …*Listen you wanton creature, you say 'I am, and there is none besides me; I will never be a widow, or suffer the loss of children. Both of these will overtake you in a moment, on a single day*… (Isaiah 47:1-15 KJV).

In Chapter 16 (*16-4 The Euphrates*) we noted the reference to the kings of the East whom we saw to be the kings of Media and Persia. The historical Babylon in fact was overrun by the Medes and Persians in the year 539 BC when Cyrus and his army diverted the river Euphrates and entered the city via the riverbed while the nation's leaders were partying[86]. The story is told in Daniel Chapter 5. Cyrus, in his overthrow of Babylon, thus became a type of Christ, and because of this God made special reference to him in prophecy through Isaiah. Describing Cyrus, a non-Jew and a pagan in beautiful Messianic language, God says: …*Cyrus, is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure, even saying of Jerusalem, 'She will be built;' and of the temple, 'Your foundation will be laid.'"*.

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[86] It is significant that during this party Belshazzar ordered that the golden cups that had been used in the Jerusalem temple worship be brought and used as wine goblets. This blasphemous act prompted verse 6, *Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done. Mix her a double portion from her own cup.*

He also says, "*Yahweh says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have held, to subdue nations before him, and strip kings of their armour; to open the doors before him, and the gates shall not be shut:* (Isaiah 44:28 and 45:1-13).

Cyrus thus was foretold as God's anointed shepherd who would open the way into Babylon just as Jesus is to do when he returns to overthrow modern-day Babylon. After his overnight conquest of Babylon, Cyrus was undoubtedly shown Isaiah's words, which may well have been the reason he issued his decree for the restoration of the temple at Jerusalem.

Come out of her, My people.
We humans are ever ready to condemn or criticise those who do not believe as we do. So many of the world's ills have been inflicted by our intolerance of others, and today the situation is every bit as bad as it was during the Dark Ages. Much of what is published on the internet on matters of religion contains unkind, and often very poorly researched material concerning other faiths and their adherents as though the destruction of that faith is their prime mission in life. Yet such writing is not in harmony with the Spirit of Christ. *The servant of the Lord must be gentle to all men* is the Apostle Paul's advice to young Timothy, about to embark upon a ministerial career (2 Timothy 2:24).

A wise person once stated that the best way to detect a counterfeit dollar bill is to study the true one. This is good advice, for it is not necessary to study error in order to recognise it. Just as sheep recognise the voice of their shepherd, and will not follow a stranger, so the student of the Bible will know when he or she is hearing error. Where it is felt necessary to point out false doctrine, it should be done in Christian love and compassion, restricting the discussion to the doctrines and not the people who follow them, nor their leaders; for they are still nascent citizens of God's kingdom. One godly minister I knew always used to say when challenged, "Well now, let's see what God's Word says". He would then embark upon a journey through the Scriptures from one passage to another, using the counsel of Isaiah 28:10, until like a jigsaw puzzle, a beautiful picture would emerge. I was once accosted by two zealous young men distributing religious tracts; when I pointed out why I disagreed with their theology one of the young men raised his hand to heaven and cried out, "You have been given truth and rejected it; your blood be upon your own head." They

then turned on their heel and walked away. These two young men knew their doctrines, but they were not imbued with the Spirit of Christ.

Therefore the passage under consideration, *Come out of her, My people",* teaches a vital principle in living with others not of our faith. It has been the intent of this book to present understanding of the Book of Revelation in such a way as will leave no reader offended, and where it has failed, I sincerely regret the offence.

18-3 The World's Trade

Rev 18:11-20

> *The merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her, for no one buys their merchandise any more:*
> *12 merchandise of gold, silver, precious stones, pearls, fine linen, purple, silk, scarlet, all expensive wood, every vessel of ivory, every vessel made of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble;*
> *13 and cinnamon, incense, perfume, frankincense, wine, olive oil, fine flour, wheat, sheep, horses, chariots, and people's bodies and souls.*
> *14 The fruits which your soul lusted after have been lost to you. All things that were dainty and sumptuous have perished from you, and you will find them no more at all.*
> *15 The merchants of these things, who were made rich by her, will stand far away for the fear of her torment, weeping and mourning,*
> *16 saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, she who was dressed in fine linen, purple, and scarlet, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls!*
> *17 For in an hour such great riches are made desolate.' Every ship master, and everyone who sails anywhere, and mariners, and as many as gain their living by sea, stood far away,*
> *18 and cried out as they looked at the smoke of her burning, saying, 'What is like the great city?'*
> *19 They cast dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and mourning, saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, in which all who had their ships in the sea were made rich by reason of her great wealth!' For she is made desolate in one hour.*

20 "Rejoice over her, O heaven, you saints, apostles, and prophets; for God has judged your judgment on her."

We should note that since we entered that section of the Book of Revelation commencing with Chapter 15, the last plagues, we have found the imagery to lend itself better to a more literal interpretation. It seems that as we enter the last events, John sees actual scenes of destruction rather than a symbolic portrayal of it. Yet there are still symbolic images presented. For example, the bowls poured out are presumably symbols, while the effects on the earth appear to be literal. Similarly the harlot and the beast are symbols, but this description of the end of world trade appears to be literal. The description of the goods being traded suggests a literal interpretation, but the world's trade in the last days is not so much silks and exotic woods, but fuel oil, manufactured goods, and a lot of money. In December 2019 $US6.6 trillion were traded daily around the world.[87]

We note that they also trade in the *bodies and souls of men.* This immediately brings to mind the slave trade, but today that industry has been largely replaced by the sex industry which is well known enough not to have to spell out the details here. The plight of these unfortunate women and children surely does not go unnoticed in heaven, and those who become rich by this practice will certainly meet their reward.

Whatever the degree of symbolism in this passage, there is no doubt that the woman will have immense economic clout. We are told in Revelation 13:16-17 that the religious alliance has the power to control who will be able to buy or sell. To do this they must also control the economy, and hence must be heavily involved in the world's banking and monetary policy.

But why will the woman on the beast, a religious power, have so much influence over the world's economy and trade? Her unbelievable wealth has much to do with it. She is described here as wearing *fine linen, purple and scarlet, and glittering with gold, precious stones, and pearls!*

This section is given entirely to the sentiments of the *merchants of the earth.* These traders appear to be far more concerned about the loss of

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87 Source:https://www.statista.com/statistics/247328/activity-per-trading-day-on-the-global-currency-market, December 2019.

their trade than they are over the destruction of the woman and her mount. To their shame they also appear to show no concern for the abominations practiced by the harlot. Their interest is money, and they are willing to sacrifice all principle for the mighty dollar without conscience as to where their money comes from. How many today will stand by principle and refuse to trade with questionable regimes or companies? If we all would refuse to buy shares in those companies whose products bring about pain and suffering, how much better the world might be.

18-4 Babylon Destroyed

Rev 18:21-24

> *A mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and cast it into the sea, saying, "Thus with violence will Babylon, the great city, be thrown down, and will be found no more at all.*
> *22 The voice of harpists, minstrels, flute players, and trumpeters will be heard no more at all in you. No craftsman, of whatever craft, will be found any more at all in you. The sound of a mill will be heard no more at all in you.*
> *23 The light of a lamp will shine no more at all in you. The voice of the bridegroom and of the bride will be heard no more at all in you; for your merchants were the princes of the earth; for with your sorcery all the nations were deceived.*
> *24 In her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on the earth."*

Much of what we have read in Chapters 17 and 18 concerning Babylon comes from the Old Testament prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Revelation 18 especially alludes to Ezekiel Chapters 26-28 in which we see the demise of the City of Tyre, a seaport of major importance in those days. Described as a city of great wealth and beauty, Tyre is a type of Babylon. Like Babylon, how could a city so rich and important ever collapse? Yet as Babylon was prophesied to become a haunt for jackals, so this ancient metropolis was prophesied to become a vacant block on which fishermen would dry their nets. Today of course, the

sites of both these cities are exactly as predicted. The forecast that such a city would completely disappear would have been incredible to those who lived in it at the time, just as it would be today should someone tell us that London or Los Angeles will become an uninhabited wasteland.

Ezekiel 28:12-19 contains that enigmatic passage concerning Tyre that likens her to Satan the once magnificent angel Lucifer, so exalted that he stood by the throne of heaven. But, we are told, *Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty. You have corrupted your wisdom by reason of your splendour. I have cast you to the ground. I have laid you before kings, that they may see you.*(v17) Here we see the parallel with Revelation 18 in which the kings of the earth watch as the woman, like Jezebel, is brought to nothing.

Perhaps the close of Chapter 18 is a good place to try to paint a picture of the scenario unfolded so far. Here we have a glimpse of life in the last days, a new world order, with its ten godless oligarchs , who all gain their inspiration from a religious authority that controls such personal aspects of our lives as how we spend our money and how we worship. To be realistic we must expect millions around the world to resist such control. In these days in which human rights are promoted, it is improbable that any democracy would permit such a scenario. However, the description of the world by the time the plagues have fallen is one of such devastation that people will see civilisation as under threat, and will see a return to the church and organised religion as its only hope. Unfortunately, the demands made by the church will not be in harmony with the Scriptures and, we have been told, discordant with *the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus* (Revelation 12:17).

Amazingly, and quite uncharacteristically for Western democracies, obedience to these laws is deemed so important that those who refuse to comply are sentenced to death. This seems unthinkable, and for it to happen the world must have become a very different place than it is today. Evidently the fate of the world depends upon obedience to these laws, and for there to be such animosity toward those who refuse to comply, people must believe that compliance has to be universal in order to save the planet.

Normally, as mentioned, very few people in western democracies would acquiesce to state laws regarding religion. Without doubt millions would, as a rule, refuse to comply; some for political reasons, some out

of distrust of their government, some who just like to buck the system, and some for reasons of conscience. In this situation however, it seems that the death decree will be sufficient incentive for all to submit except those who understand the deception and place the Law of God above laws of man. What a strange scenario this is; one would not believe it except that the Scriptures say it will happen.

It takes little imagination to realise how difficult this will be for those who refuse to obey the laws. The temptation to cooperate will be overwhelming. One wonders why God seems to be so unreasonable. Can't He be a little flexible? It seems that "we who are alive and remain" (1 These 4:17) at this time are those who must act in the drama of the conflict between good and evil at its very climax. For Satan, all is at stake in his plot to be "like the Most High". When he overcame the first Adam he became prince of this world; now, if he can demonstrate before heaven that he is the undisputed ruler of the earth, that not one living soul withholds allegiance from him, then he will claim to have legally replaced Christ as the Son of God. The inhabitants of heaven all now fully understand the true nature of Lucifer and the falsity of his claims that God is unjust. They have seen their beloved Commander hanging on the cross, and realise that it happened because Lucifer was a liar from the beginning. Can God's people now excuse themselves from obeying God's Word? God forbid. Like Queen Esther they would rather perish than fail to do their duty.

Chapter 19

19-1 Justice at Last

Rev 19:1-3

> *After these things I heard something like a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, "Hallelujah! Salvation, power, and glory belong to our God;*
> *2 for his judgments are true and righteous. For he has judged the great prostitute, who corrupted the earth with her sexual immorality, and he has avenged the blood of his servants at her hand."*
> *3 A second said, "Hallelujah! Her smoke goes up forever and ever."*

The source of the multitude's jubilation is that justice has at last been meted out to the woman. For millennia the inhabitants of heaven have had to witness the maltreatment of those who have refused to worship contrary to the Scriptures. Now at last, when the entire universe has seen and fully understood the real fruit of Satan's rebellion, God can complete His 'strange' act (Isaiah 28:21). Never again will Babylon rule, and never again will worship be confused. Thus heaven exults that Babylon's smoke will rise for ever and ever.

The expression 'for ever and ever' need not be understood in a literal sense, as though smoke will somewhere be rising eternally. For the woman represents false worship, not a physical entity. The passage alludes to Isaiah 34:8-10 in which the smoke from Edom is to ascend for ever and ever. This topic was discussed in some detail in *14-4 The Third Angel's Message.*

19-2 Heaven Sings Again

Rev 19:4-9

> *The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sits on the throne, saying, "Amen! Hallelujah!"*

5 A voice came from the throne, saying, "Give praise to our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, the small and the great!"
6 I heard something like the voice of a great multitude, and like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of mighty thunders, saying, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns!
7 Let's rejoice and be exceedingly glad, and let's give the glory to him. For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his wife has made herself ready."
8 It was given to her that she would array herself in bright, pure, fine linen: for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.
9 He said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb.'" He said to me, "These are true words of God."

The scene depicted here is very similar to the one we witnessed in Chapter 5 in which we saw the inauguration of Christ after His ascension to heaven. There we heard the magnificent angel choir join the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures in a refrain that echoed throughout the halls of heaven. Now we hear it again.

So what event, if any, causes our attention to be drawn back to their song? This time it is another heavenly ceremony that is to take place; the marriage of the Lamb. The Lamb of course is Christ, but who is He to marry? Who is this bride who has made herself ready? Is there some stunning daughter of God we did not know about? The answer is yes, and we have made reference to her in *3-1 Sardis* and *12-1 The First Woman on the Moon.* This marriage imagery is so inspiring that we cannot pass on without spending a little more time with it. For Christ used it time and time again during His earthly ministry.

When Jesus shared with His disciples the bread and the wine in that blessed ceremony that Christians have adopted as the Lord's Supper, or Holy Communion, He was in fact observing the element of a betrothal ceremony quite familiar to Jews, and known as the *erusin*. A young man would offer the wine to his bride for her to take as a sign of their pledge to one another. After she had taken the wine, he would say to her, "I am returning to my father's home to prepare a place for you. Then I will return and receive you to myself"[88]. After the betrothal

[88] See John 14: 1-3.

ceremony, he would return home to his parents' house to commence the construction of additional rooms for him and his bride-to-be. One can picture the excitement of this young groom as he designs this dwelling with just her in mind; how he yearns for the day when he can bring her to be with him. But the work is slow, and his father, bless him, keeps telling him to redo this and that, and not cut corners. Never would he think of bringing his beautiful girl to the house before it meets his father's final approval. And who knows how long that will take?

Finally, the great day arrives, but the finishing touches have taken longer than expected, and it is not until midnight that the call goes out, "Here's the bridegroom, come out to meet him". Matthew 25:1-13 vividly pictures the scene of confusion in the bride's home as they bustle about getting ready for the groom's arrival. What a lesson on the importance of being ever ready for Christ's return. How beautiful the words of Isaiah *62:5, For as a young man marries a virgin, so your sons will marry you. As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so your God will rejoice over you.* [89]

Now, we are told in verse 7, the time has come for the heavenly Groom to collect His bride. All her preparations are complete, and she is eagerly awaiting Him dressed in the robes given to her by God Himself. What pictorial language to describe Christ's return to earth! It omits the wild descriptions of the plagues, earthquakes, falling rocks, tsunamis and other cataclysmic events taking place upon the earth, and just states that the Father has said, "Enough, go and bring her home".

In Matthew 22:1-14, we read the parable Christ told when on earth about the wedding banquet. In that story a king prepares a wedding banquet for his son, and servants are dispatched with instructions to inform all the invited guests invited that the time for the wedding has come. But the invitees all make excuses and refuse to come; some even mishandle the messengers. In response, the king invites, in their places, the common people from the streets and alleys. Regardless of their standing in society and their code of conduct, wedding garments are given to all who wish to come.

But one man tries to attend the wedding in his own clothes and is immediately evicted. The king would not tolerate the presence of

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[89] For further reading on this poignant subject, the writer recommends the book *Echoes of His Presence*, by Ray Vander Laan with Judith Markham, Focus on the Family Publishing, Colorado Springs, 1996.

anyone not attired in the garments he has provided. So what are these garments? They are, we are told, the righteousness, the obedience - of those invited.

That our righteous works should enable us to attend the marriage supper of the Lamb is disturbing to those raised in the understanding of 'saved by grace'. Yet, there is no inconsistency, for it is still by grace that the saints receive the garment. The garment was not given in return for the righteous deeds; it just represents them. The passage does remind us however, that works, while not an entitlement to salvation, are a fruit of it, and are an integral part of the Christian way. Those who claim to follow Christ, but who think they can continue in sin because they are saved by grace have no righteous deeds to be represented by the garment. Thus they are excluded from the wedding. This passage should be taken very seriously by those who believe that God's grace replaces their need to live according to His Word.

This section closes with the fourth beatitude of Revelation. Happy are those who are invited. What an understatement this is. Those invited to the wedding will have experienced the bitterest persecution and tribulation, but through Christ will have overcome sin and Satan once and for all. Never again will they suffer sickness, pain, grief, or death; they will be forever with Christ in the earth restored to its Edenic beauty. Truly, to say they are happy, even rapturous or ecstatic, only goes to confirm the inability of human language to describe heavenly themes. Surely in heaven the bride will speak a new language, one in which she can express herself in words fit for the glory of the King.

19-3 The Spirit of Prophecy

Rev 19:10

> *I fell down before his feet to worship him. He said to me, "Look! Don't do it! I am a fellow bondservant with you and with your brothers who hold the testimony of Jesus. Worship God, for the testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of Prophecy."*

It must have been John's elation that led him to forget himself and fall at the feet of this angel. We can sympathise with him for he has just heard the joyful refrain of a jubilant heaven as the Bridegroom has now

been permitted to go and bring home His lover. Yet John is instantly rebuked, for this angel is a fellow servant who also testifies of Jesus.

In fact it is not since Chapter 17 that anyone has been identified as John's guide. In 17:1 John says that one of the angels carrying one of the seven vials came and spoke with him. This angel stays with him throughout Chapter 17, but is not mentioned again until 19:9. Therefore we would probably be forgiven for assuming that it is this angel of Chapter 17 that he has tried to worship.

Nevertheless a first reading of 19:10 suggests that it is a human who is speaking to John, for he says he is a fellow servant and a brother who witnesses of Jesus. Yet angels are also fellow servants and witnesses of Christ. If this was a human, John would have known it, and certainly would not have made the mistake of trying to worship him. So far the only humans we have seen in the temple are the twenty-four elders, and we can be quite certain that had it been one of those who spoke to John, he would have identified him as such. Additionally the description of this angel in Chapter 15:1 and 6 is not that of a human, for he has no *stephanos* - crown of victory. One also wonders if God would use a redeemed human to pour out such destruction upon his fellow man.

Now we come to this enigmatic phrase, *For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.* We read in Chapter 12:17 that Satan's wrath is particularly vicious toward those who obey God's commandments and have the testimony of Jesus. Here we learn that the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. There is much to be said about this, but it has already been discussed in some detail in *12-5 The Remnant.* Therefore the reader is strongly recommended to re-read that section of that chapter entitled, *The Testimony of Jesus*.

In that section we noted the Scriptural evidence for some form of prophetic activity during the last days known as the 'spirit of prophecy'. Yet how shall we discern what is true and what is false? Like the Bereans who were commended for their diligence in searching of the Scriptures to verify the things they heard, we must also study the teachings of those who claim to have a message for these times. That may seem a daunting process, but fortunately both the Old and New Testaments indicate the things we should look for in evaluating these

'prophets'. In many cases it takes only a brief study to evaluate the contenders.[90]

Let us therefore look at some of the tests that Scripture applies to prophecy:

1. Deuteronomy 13:1-5. *If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, "Let's go after other gods" (which you have not known) "and let's serve them," you shall not listen to the words of that prophet.* There are popular pantheistic teachings today that would have us believe that we can become as gods and that God is within us. These teachings present man has having within him the seeds of his own salvation. Their prophets teach that we must get in touch with our inner selves. Many self-help gurus follow such a philosophy. But in spite of the popularity of these teachings, and the shelves full of their books for sale in popular book stores, they are not in harmony with the teachings of the Bible.

2. Deuteronomy 18:9-12. *There shall not be found with you anyone who makes his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who tells fortunes, or an enchanter, or a sorcerer, or a charmer, or someone who consults with a familiar spirit, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For whoever does these things is an abomination to Yahweh.* This instruction should go without saying it, but there is a popular resurgence in spiritism today, many of whose adherents claim to be followers of Jesus.

3. Deuteronomy 18:21-22. *You may say in your heart, "How shall we know the word which Yahweh has not spoken?" When a prophet speaks in Yahweh's name, if the thing doesn't follow, nor happen, that is the thing which Yahweh has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You shall not be afraid of him.* Into this category perhaps we should put astrology with its endless predictions about what kind of a day we will have; its tarot cards and other paraphernalia for supposedly guiding us through life without any need for God.

4. Matthew 7:15-20. *…By their fruits you will know them.* This important test comes from the lips of Christ Himself. The Apostle Paul

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[90] It is not the intent of this book to identify the true or false. The writer prefers that the reader take the trouble to do that.

identified these fruits as love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, and faith (Galatians 5:22). From these fruits we will see acts of charity and mercy such as those described by Christ in his depiction of the sheep and the goats on judgment day. Fruit does not always appear immediately, so it may require some time of observation to see what fruits grow from a particular set of doctrines.

5. Isaiah 8:20. *To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them* (KJV). This instruction runs remarkably parallel to John's words in Revelation 1:9 and 12:17, for again we find this twofold reference to obedience and witness. In Isaiah's case the testimony refers to his written prophecy concerning Assyria's future invasion. His document was to be bound and held against the day of its fulfilment as a witness to the genuineness of his prophetic role. What an important test this is, for as with John, Isaiah extols the keeping of God's *Torah* as an essential in identifying those who God sees as His own. Any 'prophet' who denigrates God's Law or downplays obedience to it, must immediately be suspect.

There are many Christians, especially among the evangelical community, who might be uncomfortable with these words, fearing legalism. This is a genuine concern, and those who uphold the Law must ever be awake to the danger of replacing faith with works as a means of salvation. However, obedience is not legalism; obedience is a fruit of faith, not a means to it. The legalist seeks salvation through obedience or through good works, but the Scriptures are emphatic that those who are obedient, even to death, are still saved by grace, and not by their obedience. This does not mean works are unimportant, for as we seen above, they are the fruit of salvation.

6. 1 John 4:1-3. …*Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God.* The entirety of 1 John is most valuable in this matter, for its theme is Jesus, and Jesus must be the focal point of our faith. The greatest test of all is how does the prophet present, live, glorify, and extol Jesus? As we have seen in *1-5 The Incomparable Jesus*, Christ is at the centre of our faith; He is everything; he is incomparable. Any 'prophet' who finds cause to diminish Christ in the least in his teachings, cannot claim as his the spirit of prophecy.

19-4 The King is Coming

Rev 19:11-16

> *I saw the heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it is called Faithful and True. In righteousness he judges and makes war.*
> *12 His eyes are a flame of fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has names written and a name written which no one knows but he himself.*
> *13 He is clothed in a garment sprinkled with blood. His name is called "The Word of God."*
> *14 The armies which are in heaven followed him on white horses, clothed in white, pure, fine linen.*
> *15 Out of his mouth proceeds a sharp, double-edged sword, that with it he should strike the nations. He will rule them with an iron rod. He treads the wine press of the fierceness of the wrath of God, the Almighty.*
> *16 He has on his garment and on his thigh a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS."*

These words allude to Isaiah 63:1-6 in which is prophesied the time that God will judge the nations. He uses the analogy of the winepress, a vat into which grapes are placed and then trodden until all the juice has been extracted. In the process of 'treading the winepress', the garment of the person treading would become stained red with the juice. Thus Christ's robe here is stained in blood.

This scene helps us better understand the last three verses of Revelation 14 in which we read that the vine of the earth was thrown into the winepress of God's anger until the blood was to the level of the horses' bridles. This does not mean that the blood was that deep; it means that the horses ridden by Christ and His angels were stained in blood up to the height of the bridle.

There is no doubt that the rider of the white horse is Christ. His name, Faithful and True, describes the beauty of His character. His eyes and his sword are as those described in Revelation 1:14-16. His name, *the Word of God*, reminds us of the words used by this same John when he wrote in his Gospel, *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God* (John 1:1-3). Who else but Jesus could be called *King of Kings and Lord of Lords*?

The Word of God, the Holy Bible, is something like an onion – if one will pardon the rather crude analogy. The outside appears ordinary enough with nothing in particular to attract itself to the reader; just a book like many other books. But as the honest seeker opens the outer cover and starts to read, he finds inside ever-deeper layers of truth, each layer purer than the one above. Just when he thinks he is beginning to understand, he discovers another layer, and peels that away until, when he arrives at the centre, there is the purest and sweetest part of the Book. It is Jesus He has found. For the redeemed, their joy will be to continue this study into all eternity, learning ever more of the love of God and the beauty of His Son.

It is in this section of Revelation that another layer is revealed. During the famous discourse between Jesus and His disciples in which He promised Peter the keys of the kingdom, Jesus closed the conversation with these words: *For the Son of Man will come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he will render to everyone according to his deeds* (Matthew 16:27). Similarly He reminded John in the closing words of the Book of Revelation: *Behold, I come quickly. My reward is with me, to repay to each man according to his work* (Rev 22:12).

In both these passages Jesus promises His faithful ones that when He comes back He will bring a reward with Him. Now in Chapter 19 He is returning, but does he bring a reward? The answer is yes! But to see it we need to refer back to the letters to the seven churches, for to each of them a reward was promised, and it is from them that we learn what the rewards are. Let us look at each church and its reward promised:

Ephesus: will be given to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. Their reward found in 19:7-9 in which the redeemed are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb. This supper will certainly include the fruit from the Tree of Life, not eaten by man since our first parents tasted it.

Smyrna: Will be given a crown of life and not be hurt by the second death. The reward of this church is referred to in Revelation 20:4-6 where the souls of those beheaded for Christ are blessed, for the second death has no power over them. They are made priests of God and Christ. Of all the churches it was Smyrna that suffered 'even to the death' for their faith.

Pergamos: Is given hidden manna, a white stone, and a new name known only to those who receive it. Chapter 19:12 informs us that Christ, as He returns, carries that name that no one knows but Himself.

Thyatira: Is given power over the nations to rule them with a rod of iron. Chapter 19:15 reveals Christ carrying the sword that acts as a rod with which to rule the nations.

Sardis: Is clothed in white raiment, and the overcomer's name remains in the Book of Life. The return of Christ sees the armies of heaven dressed in white, and Chapter 20:12-15 tells us that the names of the righteous are found in the Book of Life.

Philadelphia: Is commended for having kept God's Word, and the word of His patience. Now it is promised that Christ will write upon it His new name. In Chapter 19:13 Christ bears the name The Word of God.

Laodicea: Is promised that it will eat with Christ, and that Christ will eat with it. Thus in 19:9 this church is invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Thus we see that when Christ returns he does carry His rewards with Him, and each humble soul, regardless of the era in which he or she has lived, will be given on that glorious day what was promised them.

19-5 The Two Banquets

Rev 19:17-21

> *I saw an angel standing in the sun. He cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the sky, "Come! Be gathered together to the great supper of God,*
> *18 that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, small and great."*
> *19 I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him who sat on the horse, and against his army.*

> *20 The beast was taken, and with him the false prophet who worked the signs in his sight, with which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulphur.*
> *21 The rest were killed with the sword of him who sat on the horse, the sword which came out of his mouth. All the birds were filled with their flesh.*

Those who have had the privilege of attending a lavish wedding well remember the magnificent setting, often a beautifully manicured garden beset with marquee tents, tables laden with food and drinks, an orchestra playing in the background, and a congenial atmosphere as the newlywed couple circulate among the guests.

The marriage supper of the Lamb is to be set in the beauty of heaven amid picturesque splendour that cannot be imagined. The River of Life drifts gently from the throne of God beneath a magnificent archway formed by what appears to be two trees, but upon closer inspection, is seen to be but one. From this tree hangs fruit that has never been seen or tasted by anyone since the first holy couple in Eden; this is the Tree of Life. Stretching into the distance is a table spread liberally with fruits and other foods from the trees and shrubs of heaven. Those present have no difficulty extending their gaze over the full length of the table, for their eyes belong to new bodies; incorruptible; eternal.

At the head of the table stands none other than the beautiful Jesus, a royal crown adorning his holy head, and a kingly robe shining in its brilliance. The happiness on His countenance is wonderful to behold as He welcomes His friends to their new home. His joy is so great that He cannot contain it and He bursts into rapturous song.[91] Angel choirs join the refrain, and all of heaven becomes filled with the sound of sweet music. The redeemed too have a song to sing, but it is one that only they can sing, for it is the song of their experience. Yet when they behold the beauty around them and look at the lovely face of Jesus, their recent sufferings fade into insignificance, and they understand that for them heaven was cheap enough.

As Jesus extends His hands in welcome, the redeemed glimpse upon them something that mars the perfection of the scene. He bears on His

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[91] The LORD thy God in the midst of thee *is* mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing. Zephaniah 3:17

hands the memory of the price He paid for their salvation, the scars from the nails of Calvary. But this one piece of ugliness is to them the most beautiful sight in all heaven, for they understand that while heaven was cheap enough for them, it cost the Son of God an infinite price, the fullness of which even eternity will fail to reveal to them. For God's love is infinite. In wonder and adoration the redeemed cast their crowns to the ground and worship their Redeemer, their King, and their God.

We would rather stay with this scene, but these rewards are not yet. We must remain faithful a little longer. For our text has passed from this to another banquet, one to which the only invited guests are vultures and crows. Rotting meat is their food; blood is their drink. There is no singing – only the sound of the gorging of flesh.

When Christ returns to the earth at the Second Advent, the 'peoples of the earth' will gather together to repel Him. They will see Him as an invader and will use all their sophisticated weaponry against Him. Differing interpretations will be given as to the meaning of the small cloud that comes toward the earth. Some will see it as an asteroid. Others will see it as some alien force from another planet. Yet others will see it as some supernatural phenomenon. Among the 'peoples of the earth', only Satan and his demonic angels will know that it is King Jesus, and they will stir up the nations to destroy Him. Yet their weapon systems will be powerless against this heavenly Force. Too late, they will realise that they have been deceived, that they have opposed God Himself.

Being deceived does not count as righteousness, for had they believed the Word of God they would have known. Eve's deception did not save her from death, for had she trusted the Word of God, she would not have been deceived. So all these will be destroyed. Among them will be those who have persistently rejected the prompting of God's Spirit, and who have chosen to live their lives apart from the Law of God. Among them are the beast and the false prophet of Revelation 13. Among them are those who have willingly chosen to follow them. Among them are those who were responsible for placing Christ on the cross. Among them are all those whose names are not found in the Lamb's Book of Life. It is a serious thing to reject the Word of God!

Chapter 20

20-1 The Bottomless Pit

Rev 20:1-3

> *I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand.*
> *2 He seized the dragon, the old serpent, which is the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole inhabited earth, and bound him for a thousand years,*
> *3 and cast him into the abyss, and shut it, and sealed it over him, that he should deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years were finished. After this, he must be freed for a short time.*

An angel, a key, a chain, a dragon, an abyss. What thespian imagery! Yet there is still a temptation to see these images as literal. We understand the dragon to represent Satan, for we are given that information in verse 2. But what about the chain? Can a physical chain withhold a spirit being? Obviously not! So the chain must also symbolise something. Now the earth is destroyed, the unredeemed are dead, and the saved are in heaven. Therefore the usurper prince of this world no longer has a fiefdom over which to rule. All that is left to him are some crows picking over the remaining morsels of flesh from their meal. His palaces are reduced to rubble, and his schemes to nothing. The birds too will soon die, for when their feast is over there is nothing else.

What divine justice that he who said “I will be like the Most High”, the covering cherub exalted above all except Christ Himself, should be reduced to a bottomless pit. In contrast, He who humbled Himself even to death upon a cross is crowned as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. What instruction this is for those of us whose pride leads us to seek power for ourselves.

How long will this state of affairs continue? We are told one thousand years. But if all the other imagery is symbolic, why should we treat the time period as literal? We have always referred to a day as a year in prophetic literature, which if we apply in this case calculates to 360,000 years. This of course is too long for our comfort!

On the other hand, if a day represents a year, could a year represent a day? After all, Peter, in 2 Peter 3:8 did say that with the Lord one thousand years is as a day, and a day as one thousand years. Could the thousand years then be one thousand days or just less than three years? This seems possible, but unlikely because we do not find other examples of such a thing in prophetic literature.

Therefore the most reasonable way to understand this passage is that the one thousand years are just that. According to Biblical history, the earth was created six thousand years ago. Thus we have experienced six thousand years, or six 'days', of sin. There follows therefore a seventh day of rest upon the earth in which no work is done and the land lies fallow. Moses wrote these words in Leviticus 25:4: *But the seventh year shall be a sabbath of rest unto the land, a sabbath for the LORD: thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard.* In this sense therefore we see the one thousand years as a Sabbath of rest for the earth in which it rests from the stresses that have been placed upon it by six thousand years of man's sinful existence.

We could also apply the jubilee principle here, in which every fiftieth year the land was to return to its original owner, and all slaves were to be set free. Leviticus 25 makes worthwhile reading in the light of Revelation 20, for the land is to be returned to its rightful owner Jesus Christ, and those who have been enslaved upon it are to be set free to possess it for all time.

What of the bottomless pit, or abyss? The Greek word for bottomless pit, *abussos*, is the same word used by the writers of the Septuagint, the early Greek version of the Old Testament, to describe the earth in Genesis 1:2, *And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep.* The word 'deep' is *abussos.* The earth then started as an abyss, and will end as an abyss. We observed in the order of the trumpets and the plagues, that God appeared to be gradually undoing His creation prior to remaking it. In Chapter *16-2 The Nature Plagues* we explored this idea in some detail so it is not necessary to cover it again. We understand then that the bottomless pit, or abyss, is in fact the earth, and that Satan will be bound to it by chains of circumstance that allow him no opportunity to exercise his power simply because there is no life left upon it for him to control.

According to Revelation 21:1 God will remake the earth at the end of the one thousand years, but before He does Satan will be released for

a short period of time, during which he will again control the nations. We shall explore this further when we reach verse 7 and see how Satan will again control the nations as he had one thousand years earlier.

20-2 The First Resurrection

Rev 20:4-6

> *I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus, and for the word of God, and such as didn't worship the beast nor his image, and didn't receive the mark on their forehead and on their hand. They lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.*
> *5 The rest of the dead didn't live until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.*
> *6 Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over these, the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and will reign with him one thousand years.*

The text is not clear, especially who it was to whom judgment was given. Yet other passages make clear that it is the redeemed that have this responsibility. Perhaps not all the redeemed, but those who gave their lives for Christ, for it says, *those who were beheaded for the witness of Jesus.*

That it is the redeemed who judge the world is supported in other passages, for example Daniel in Chapter 7:22 recorded the same thought in these words: "…*and judgment was given to the saints of the most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom."* Likewise the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:2,3 tells us. "*Don't you know that the saints will judge the world? Don't you know that we shall judge angels?"* Therefore we can understand that it is the redeemed and resurrected saints who sit on these thrones.

Some terminology must be explained here, for tradition has altered the meaning of some words used in the Scriptures. The Bible describes all those who follow Christ, and are obedient to Him, as saints. Therefore

the word ‘saint’ in the Bible does not refer to someone designated so by the Church, but anyone who does the will of God.

Therefore the word ‘soul’ used in our text refers to those designated by Christ as saints, and not to some disembodied spirit. In Genesis 2:7 we read that when God breathed life into man he became a living soul, or being. He was not given a soul; he became one. This is an important concept in understanding the nature of man in death, and without this understanding it will be difficult to appreciate the importance of the resurrection that is described in this scene. For we are told that the saints are to be raised from death at the first resurrection to reign with Christ for one thousand years. Therefore the first resurrection occurs at the same time that Satan is cast into the abyss, and includes all those from the time of Adam who have died forgiven.

The popular belief that the righteous go straight to heaven when they die does not gel with these words, for if the saints are already alive in heaven, what does it mean that they ‘come to life’ at the resurrection? All that the resurrection would do would be to reunite a disembodied soul with its body again. But because a person *is* a soul, it is the soul that is raised to life at the resurrection.

The emphasis in Scripture as regards life after death is always in terms of the resurrection. The hope of the people was always expressed in terms of the resurrection at the last day. Some examples:

Job 19:25-27 *I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself…*

Psalm 17:15 *And I - in righteousness I will see your face; when I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness.*

Isaiah 26:19 *But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust wake up and shout for joy…*

Daniel 12:2 *Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.*

Daniel 12:13 *As for you, go your way till the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days you will rise…*

John 11:23 *Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha answered" I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day…"*

These are just a very few samples of the many sentiments expressed in the Scriptures regarding death and resurrection. One can immediately see that these are not in harmony with the tradition that the righteous dead are already in heaven in spirit form. The primary passage that has led to such belief is Luke 16:19-31, a parable Jesus told concerning two men, one who died and went to 'Abraham's bosom', and the other who died and went to 'hell'. To use this passage to teach the immortality of the soul, though, is fraught with difficulty because the context concerns the importance of obedience to the Word of God, not the state of the dead. Jesus was telling a story to help His hearers understand that if the people would not obey the words of Moses, they would not listen even if one arose from the grave to tell them. In this Christ referred to Himself, that when He arose from the dead, still the people would not believe. If it is to be understood as an accurate description of heaven and hell, one must ask what kind of places they are that the dead can communicate in such a way. We should also note that the man who went to 'hell' went only to the grave, the Greek word for grave being *hades.*

In order to understand the events that occur in the latter chapters of Revelation, it is therefore important to have a correct understanding of what happens at death, and the significance of the resurrection. For this reason we have laboured this point a little. Let us now try to piece together the events that occur surrounding the return of Christ.

Revelation Chapters 15 to 17 describe the state of the earth during the final phase of its history. The plagues are making life on the planet almost unbearable, and organised religion seeks to appease God's anger by instituting religious laws that are not in harmony with Scripture. Those who refuse to obey these laws are seen as the ones ultimately responsible for the earth's crisis, and are the object of the world's anger, for it is believed that while there are those who refuse to obey these laws, God's anger will not turn.

Chapter 18 describes the collapse of the church-state world government as the inhabitants of the earth realise they have been

deceived. Much of the world's economy collapses, and many nations become essentially failed states.

Chapter 19 describes the second advent of Christ at which time the peoples of the earth, the unsaved, are destroyed. The redeemed who are alive at the second coming are caught up to heaven along with the righteous dead who are, at this time, raised to life (1Thessalonians 4:16-17). Therefore from this point onwards, all the redeemed are alive in heaven, and all the unsaved are upon the earth dead.

With this geographical distinction between the saved and the unsaved, the living and the dead, we enter Chapter 20, which describes a period of one thousand years, popularly known as 'the millennium'. During this time the redeemed are in heaven to live and reign with Christ one thousand years (verses 4, 6). The unsaved are dead upon the earth, Satan himself their unemployed sexton (verses 2, 5). The rest of Chapter 20 now describes what happens at the end of the thousand years.

20-3 Satan's Parole

Rev 20:7-10

> *And after the thousand years, Satan will be released from his prison,*
> *8 and he will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to the war; the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.*
> *9 They went up over the width of the earth, and surrounded the camp of the saints, and the beloved city. Fire came down out of heaven from God and devoured them.*
> *10 The devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur, where the beast and the false prophet are also. They will be tormented day and night forever and ever.*

We might wonder how Satan can deceive the nations when their inhabitants are dead. The answer is found in verse 5, which tells us that they are raised again at the end of the thousand years, not to eternal

life, but to face sentence and the second death. This is the second resurrection, and involves only the lost. For how long they remain alive we are not told; we know that their lives have been evaluated during the millennium, and that now the entire universe knows why they are not saved.

We should not be insensitive here, for there is always a tendency to be unsympathetic towards those who reject God. But the loss of such a multitude will cause the greatest grief to heaven. How many parents, sons and daughters are there in that number? How many good men and women will die who would have been abundantly blessed had they been willing to take up their cross and follow? How many will perish who professed the name of Christ, and even did great works in His name? We would not think it possible that such people will be in that throng but that Christ said, *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will tell me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name, in your name cast out demons, and in your name do many mighty works?' Then I will tell them, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you who work iniquity"*. There will be no triumph in heaven on that day.

Free to deceive the nations once again, Satan persuades them that they are the lawful inheritors of the earth, and that they can take what is rightfully theirs. Most importantly, he reminds them that the camp of the saints contains the Tree of Life, and that with access to that tree they will be able to live forever. The sheer number of people raised in this resurrection leads them to believe they are invincible. At their head is a glorious angelic being, and leading his armies are the most brilliant generals the world has known. These vast armies are called 'Gog and Magog', an allusion to Ezekiel 38 in which these names represent all those who oppose God's people Israel. Of them He says: *And it shall come to pass at the same time when Gog shall come against the land of Israel…, that my fury shall come up in my face…And I will plead against him with pestilence and with blood; and I will rain upon him, and upon his bands, and upon the many people that are with him, an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone* (Ezekiel 38:18-22).

This mighty army, the largest ever assembled upon the earth, draws up battle lines against the camp of God's people, which we are told, is the city God loves. We wonder which city this is that is upon the earth at this time. It is unlikely to be any earthly city, for the upheavals and

convulsions that took place at the second advent would have destroyed any building of substance, and the ensuing millennium would have rendered the earth derelict. In Revelation 21 John sees the New Jerusalem descending from heaven, but the earth appears to have already been renewed when that happens. The Greek of this passage, *parembolē,* describes the camp of the saints in military terms as though it were a fortification, or castle, even a barracks, rather than a place where worship is the theme. Yet it is also described as the beloved city, *polis.* So what is the camp of the saints?

To understand this we must examine the events that take place upon the earth at the close of the millennium. For at this time Christ calls the unsaved dead back to life. Does he do this from heaven? Or does He establish Himself upon the earth prior to their resurrection?

From our understanding of the Jubilee principle, we know that the earth was returned to its rightful owner, Jesus Christ, the Second Adam, at His return. When the earth was first created, God set aside a part of it, the Garden of Eden, to be a special place of even greater beauty and majesty than the rest of the already magnificent earth. This was, in a sense, heaven on earth. After Adam was driven from the garden, it remained, guarded by powerful angels so that sin could never enter therein. How long was it there? Was it destroyed in the flood? Did it, unattended, decay over time until its location was lost in the generations of man's sinful existence? Yet how could a place unaffected by sin bear the corruption of sin? Will anything holy see corruption (Psalm 16:10)? Should it not have remained in all its perfect beauty as a reminder to fallen man of a better world that might be his through obedience to God's word? If that is the case we must ask whether God would destroy in the Flood that which is perfect and sinless. God forbid! Therefore it is reasonable to conjecture that prior to the Flood, God removed Eden from the earth, taking it to heaven so that one small portion of His original work would remain as a remnant of the original, free from the curse placed upon the earth, like a seed saved from a dying tree to again be planted when the drought ends.

Is the camp of the saints then none other than the paradise of God, the Garden of Eden, returned to the earth to be the dwelling place of Adam and Eve and their righteous descendants? In that the curse still exists upon the earth, the mighty angels are still there to guard it against unauthorised entry, hence the military language used to describe it. No wonder Satan seeks it for himself; for this is what he has coveted from the day iniquity was found in him.

It is difficult, from the text, to ascertain whether the camp of the saints represents the entirety of the holy city, the New Jerusalem that descends from heaven in Chapter 21, or whether it is a legation of that city, the city itself to descend during the process of making the earth anew. Either way, it can be understood that this dwelling of the saints is Adam's home restored to its rightful place, now under the holy rule of the Second Adam, Jesus Christ. We will explore this puzzle further in Chapter 21, and come to a possible solution.

To summarise then; at the time of the second resurrection there is upon the earth a part of it inhabited by Jesus and some, or all, of the saints. When the time allocated to the earth as a Sabbath rest is complete, Christ calls forth the sleeping sinners to life. They awake, not with new and invigorated bodies, but in the same physical and mental state with which they went into the grave. What is their experience upon awaking? About them is corruption and devastation; all that was ever good about the earth is gone, and those who had brought Christ's blessing to the earth are gone. But when they behold the glory of the beloved city, their eyes light up in hope that they too can possess it. Satan, seizing his opportunity to implement once again his diabolical scheme, convinces this vast populace that it is rightfully theirs, and for the taking. Battle plans are laid; the command to attack is given, but that is as far as they get, for at that moment they are destroyed in the same way as were Sodom and Gomorrah. This destruction is so total that even Satan and his angels cannot survive. The earth, with its payload of waste and its polluted atmosphere, provides sufficient fuel for it to burn as a 'lake of fire'. As Peter says, *the elements will be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.* (2 Peter 3:7-13).

How long does this fire burn? We are told forever, but this must be understood in its Biblical sense as meaning that it burns as long as there is fuel to burn. We studied this in some detail in *14-4 The Third Angel's Message*, where we looked at the use of 'forever' as an idiom describing the effect of the event rather than the event itself. Just as Jude could write that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by eternal fire (Jude 1:7), so it will be with the world. Just as the fires went out when the land was purified, so will it be with the world.

Thus the lake of fire is not some ghoulish place where the souls of the wicked writhe in perpetual agony, nor is the bottomless pit some spiritual black hole somewhere in the universe. These are both the

earth; one becomes the other, after which the earth is made new without trace of what was before. While church tradition teaches an eternally burning hellfire in which the wicked suffer for all eternity, we can rest secure in the knowledge that the Scriptures leave no place for a situation in which the redeemed must spend all of eternity listening to the moans of their lost loved ones. Thank God there is no place where the lost must suffer eternally for the sins of a few short years.

20-4 The Second Resurrection

Rev 20:11-15

> *I saw a great white throne, and him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. There was found no place for them.*
> *12 I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and they opened books. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works.*
> *13 The sea gave up the dead who were in it. Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them. They were judged, each one according to his works.*
> *14 Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.*
> *15 If anyone was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire.*

In verse 4 we saw thrones and judgment take place. However, this was at the beginning of the millennium and entailed the process of vindicating the righteous. Now a different judgment takes place and the redeemed are not a part of it. Now it is a single throne we see, for Christ alone is given the responsibility for the executive judgment of the wicked; this is something too difficult for men to do, for their own kin are among the lost. Vengeance belongs to God, not to man.

This passage is not in chronological order, for we have already learned of the destruction of the lost. The passage rather explains the justice of God's action in destroying them. We read here that the unsaved, recently raised from death in the second resurrection, will learn the reason they are not permitted entrance to the kingdom of heaven.

One wonders why God does not simply leave them dead. What is to be gained by raising them just to destroy them again? The answer to this question is found in the legal system of heaven. Satan could well have accused God, and no doubt did accuse God, of injustice in implementing the plan of salvation. One can imagine him snarling at God, *"'The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers. Every man shall be put to death for his own sin."*[92] It was not just, he would claim, for Jesus to die for the sinner; the sinner must be the one to die.

Therefore, it is important that the entire universe fully understands the justice of God's actions in His judgment of saint and sinner. Not only the angels of heaven need to understand fully why fallen humanity can have a place in heaven, but the lost must also fully understand why they are not there. The loss of so many souls will bring infinite sadness to God, and He will not permit them to die until they fully understand the reason they are denied entrance. Then they too will bow before God and acknowledge His justice so *that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, those on earth, and those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*[93]

One may still ask if God can legally do this. If, as Deuteronomy 24:16 states, each must die for his own sin, on what legal basis could Jesus stand in our place? It could be argued that the process is legal simply because God decrees it, for in a court of law a ruling by the judge becomes law unless it is successfully appealed. However, the vindication of sinners must take place in a manner so as to avoid any future question as to their presence in heaven. For as the prophet stated, *affliction shall not rise up the second time* (Nahum 1:9).

There are two great truths of Scripture that answer this challenge. The first is found in the writings of the Apostle Paul in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15. His argument is based on the relationship between Adam and Christ, and it is this that helps us understand this complex, but important, question. Adam, the first man, was created from the earth, and was therefore fully man. Yet his life came not through the union of man and woman, but from the breath of God. For that reason

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[92] Deuteronomy 24:16

[93] Philippians 2:10-11

Luke describes him as *The son of God* (Luke 3:38). Likewise Christ was formed from the earth because his mother, being a daughter of Adam, was so. Thus He too was fully man. Yet His life also came, not from the union of man and woman, but from the breath of God, thus entitling Him also to be rightfully called the Son of God. We see then that Adam and Christ are of the same substance.

Yet Christ differs from Adam in that while both are fully man, Christ is fully divine being the *Word made flesh* (John 1:1-3). There can be no legal argument against God laying down His own life, for He is the Life-giver. Yet he could not stand in the place of guilty man unless He were fully human, and moreover, guiltless. Thus the words of the writer of Hebrews are crucial, for they state that Christ was *tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin* (Hebrews 4:15). Thus Christ, the Second Adam, qualifies to lay down His life on behalf of sinful man for the threefold reason that He is the Giver of life, He is fully man, and He is without sin.

The second truth is that all humankind, both saint and sinner, does in fact die. The difference is that while those whose sins are not forgiven die physically, those who have been forgiven die spiritually. There are many passages in Scripture that explain what it means to die spiritually, or die to self. Here are a few:

Luke 9:23 *If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.*

Rom 6:2-7 *…. We who died to sin, how could we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with him in the likeness of his death, we will also be part of his resurrection; knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be in bondage to sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin.*

Gal 2:20 *I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me. That life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me.*

These are powerful statements upon which hang the secret of the Christian life. For while those who live for self will die for eternity, those who die to self will be raised to newness of life in Christ. This occurs not just at the resurrection of the just, but on a daily basis. For the Christian walk is a daily one; each day submitting the will to God so that the things our sinful nature wants us to do we resist, and the works of God we don't really want to do, we gladly do.

Paul makes the interesting statement in Romans 6:7 that *anyone who has died has been freed from sin.* Those who have not confessed and repented of their sins can be declared free of those sins only in their death. Thus sin can be eradicated from the earth only by the justification of, or by the death of, the sinner. He who has been justified[94] has the status of one who has never sinned, and can live eternally. He who has not been justified can atone[95] for his sins only by his death. He must die completely and eternally, for only that way can the earth be free of sin. This is the second death. Romans 6:7 lends further clarity to our understanding that the wicked do not spend eternity in some hellish furnace, for their perpetual existence in any form would mean that sin could never be eradicated; something, we shall learn in the remaining chapters of Revelation, that can never happen.

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[94] The word 'justified' may be seen as 'just –if –I'd' never sinned.

[95] The word 'atone' may be seen as 'at one'. Thus the unrepentant sinner becomes at one with God only in his death.

Chapter 21

21-1 Where is the Sea?

Rev 21:1

> *I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth have passed away, and the sea is no more.*

This passage brings us to John's final look into the temple, and the start of the seventh section of the Book of Revelation. At first reading this does not appear to be a look into the temple, but as we progress through the chapter we shall see that while there is no physical temple in the new earth, it has become the eternal dwelling place of God, which is the temple.

In the previous chapter we observed our planet as it was reduced to the state in which it was prior to its creation, and have seen God implement His threat to *destroy those who destroy the earth* (Revelation 11:18). Now God recreates it, this time never to be destroyed again. But why no sea? Is this symbolic, meaning no more people or nations? No, because we know the earth will be populated with millions of people.

However, the text may not be saying that the new earth contains no sea; it may be saying that the old earth passed away along with the sea. When the earth becomes the lake of fire, it would be natural that all the moisture in the earth would evaporate. The old earth is two-thirds ocean, but when John sees the new earth these oceans are gone, and it is probable that its waters are dispersed more evenly over the planet.

Perhaps too the earth's axis will shift to a more vertical position, allowing for more stable weather patterns as it was prior to the Flood. We know that the new earth will be sustained by different ecological systems than those of today for we are told by the Apostle Paul that the saved will have incorruptible bodies (1 Corinthians 15:35-58), and Jesus said they shall be like the angels (Matthew 22:30). In order to create a world in which there is no decay, certain basic laws of life as we know them must be altered. For example the physical world today operates through a relationship between heat, work, temperature, and energy, known as thermodynamics. Fundamental to this relationship is

entropy, the amount of energy remaining in the system that is not available to be used for work. According to the second law of thermodynamics, the world is experiencing an irreversible process of 'running down' until eventually the entropy will be total, and the energy zero.[96]

In the earth made new God will create entirely new systems in which there is no nitrogen cycle, no 'circle of life'; systems in which humans, animals and plants never die,. The law of entropy will be such that the energy is total, and the entropy zero. Water from the River of Life will bring eternal refreshment, and fruit from the Tree of Life will bring eternal nourishment. The beauties of this wonderful place are too great to describe, and as the prophet Isaiah and the apostle Paul wrote, *For from of old men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, nor has the eye seen a God besides you, who works for him who waits for him.* (Isaiah 64:4. 1 Corinthians 2:9).

21-2 All Things Made New

Rev 21:2-8

> *I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband.*
> *3 I heard a loud voice out of heaven saying, "Behold, God's dwelling is with people, and he will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.*
> *4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; neither will there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more. The first things have passed away."*
> *5 He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." He said, "Write, for these words of God are faithful and true."*
> *6 He said to me, "I have become the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give freely to him who is thirsty from the spring of the water of life.*
> *7 He who overcomes, I will give him these things. I will be his God, and he will be my son.*

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96 Encyclopaedia Britannica, article E*ntropy*.

8 But for the cowardly, unbelieving, sinners, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their part is in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death."

The context of this passage suggests that the Holy City descends either as the world is being re-created or after it, but not before. Yet we have noted the presence of the saints on the planet prior to the final destruction of the old earth, and sought to understand the order of events here. The most probable scenario is that sometime during the millennium, while the unsaved are still 'asleep', Christ re-establishes a heavenly Zion on the earth. Zion is referred to in 2 Samuel 5:7 as a stronghold, or fortress. We also noted that the camp of the saints in Revelation 20:9 was described in similar terms, the Greek word for 'camp' *parembolē,* signifying a barracks, or military camp. In ancient Israel the connotation of Zion as a fortress remained until King Solomon built the Temple in Jerusalem and transferred the Ark of the Covenant there. From that time onwards Zion began to be seen less in terms of a stronghold, and more as the dwelling place of God. Similarly, we can see that while the camp of the saints was, in a sense, a fortress, so the Holy City that descends from heaven becomes the dwelling place of God.

Thus it is very possible that as the unsaved surround the camp of the saints, and fire begins to fall from heaven, the camp is lifted up from the earth in order to preserve it from the rain of death. After the destruction is complete, and the earth is made new, John sees it return, now as the most holy place in the entire universe because God has chosen it to be the seat of His authority. When sin is no more, this little sapphire planet, the lost sheep found, will be the one place in the universe that has experienced and, through Jesus Christ, overcome sin. And that makes it special.

As the apple tree among the trees of the wood,
so is my beloved among the sons.
I sat down under his shadow with great delight,
his fruit was sweet to my taste. (Song of Solomon 2:3).

Yet tears will fall at that time, not for disappointment in the new earth, but for those who could not be there. For there is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than for all those already in the fold (Luke 15:7). This joy cannot be experienced on behalf of those who did not repent, and for a time their loss will be felt. Yet the redeemed will

understand why the unsaved are not there, for could they be happy there, they would be there. All those who will gain pleasure from the purity and sinlessness of their new home, and who will love nothing more than to sing God's praise, will be there. It is not because their doctrines were incorrect, nor because they failed to understand truth, that they are not there; it is because they loved those things that have no place there, and would derive no pleasure in what is there. The new earth will be a place where praise and worship abound, where people are pure in thought word and deed, and noble in bearing. Many today struggle with these things, and plead to God for victory over temptation. For them the victory will be given, and they shall dwell in the new earth bearing on their heads the crowns of that victory. Yet there are others who sense no shame in their impurity, and make no struggle against it. These will never enjoy the loveliness of Christ, for His goodness would bring great discomfort to them; they would ever seek to hide their faces from Him. Yet in the second death their sins will be atoned for; they will be at rest, and harmony will be restored to the universe. Then God will wipe away every tear, and mourning will be no more.

In this passage we again see the interchange between God the Father and God the Son. It is the Father who says He is the God of the redeemed (v3); it is the Son who says He is the God of the redeemed (v7). It is the Son who recreates the earth (v5), who is the beginning and the ending (v6), who provides the thirst quenching water of life (v6, John 7:37).

21-3 One of the Seven

Rev 21:9-10

> *One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls, who were loaded with the seven last plagues came, and he spoke with me, saying, "Come here. I will show you the wife, the Lamb's bride."*
> *10 He carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,*

John is told he will be shown the bride, but when he looks, he sees the New Jerusalem. This is not the first time John is told to expect one thing and then sees another. We saw, for example, in Revelation 5:5

and 6, that John expected to see a Lion, but when he looked he saw a Lamb. In Revelation 7:4 and 9 John heard the number of those sealed as 144,000, but when he looked he saw a great multitude than no one could number. In Revelation 17, he looked for a prostitute sitting on 'many waters', but when he saw her she was on a beast. Why is this? Is it just a literary device? Or is it to enable us to understand the symbolic nature of what John sees?

In Revelation 17:1 John was also approached by one of the seven angels who had the seven vials. In that instance the angel showed John an unholy woman who dwelt in a corrupt city. This time he is shown a pure woman who dwells in a holy city. In order to see Babylon he was taken into a wilderness, but to see Jerusalem he was taken to the heights of a great mountain. Both cities are described in terms of their colours and of their jewellery. Unlike the corrupt city, which was described only in terms of its opposition to God, the holy city is described in great detail, as we shall see below.

21-4 The Holy City

Rev 21:11-21

> *Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal;*
> *12And had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel:*
> *13On the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates.*
> *14And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.*
> *15And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof.*
> *16And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal.*

17And he measured the wall thereof, an hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of the angel.
18And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass.
19And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald;
20The fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst.
21And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.

We would wish John had been more specific here about what he saw. Is this city a cube? Or is it shaped like a pyramid? Why does it have walls, why is it gated? Now that sin is gone, are these necessary? We saw from *14 –7 The Harvest* that a furlong, or stadia is about 185 metres. So 12,000 stadia are 2,220 kilometres (1,332 miles), but how can a city be this big? Even if it is this wide and long, how can it extend that far upwards? Numerous attempts have been made to explain this, but none seems to be quite satisfactory. It is very possible that the 12,000 stadia are the entire circumference rather than the measure of each wall. Yet, at 555 kilometres (333 miles) for each dimension, even that is difficult to visualise.

Perhaps what John saw was not a literal, but a symbolic, representation of the Holy City. The concept of 'foursquare' is not uncommon in the Hebrew Scriptures, and it is always to these we have turned when trying to understand the mysteries of this book. Again it is the sanctuary and the temple to which we must turn in order to gain enlightenment; for it is there that the foursquare dimensions are found. The Altar of Sacrifice, the Breastplate worn by the high priest, and the Altar of Burnt Incense are all square, but with varying heights. The encampment of the Children of Israel around the Sanctuary was also laid out in a square.

There is just one reference to a cubic dimension in the temple, and that is in 1 Kings 6:20. This is the description of the Most Holy Place in Solomon's Temple, which is 20 cubits in each direction. The Ark of the

Covent however, is not a cube. The description of Ezekiel's Temple in Ezekiel 41:4 shows his Most Holy Place to be 20 cubits square, but no height is given. However, in that there does seem to be some dimensional correlation to the two temples, it is quite possible that the height of Ezekiel's Most Holy Place was also 20 cubits.

Thus the Most Holy Place of the Temple is a type of the New Jerusalem, the Most Holy Place of the universe. It is where God dwells with man, and where all come to worship. We are reminded of Isaiah's words in 66:23, *And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the Lord.* We are left in no doubt about when and where the redeemed will worship their God.

The precious stones found in the Holy City allude to the description of the breastplate worn by the high priest in the temple. Here is that description found in Exodus 28:16-21: *It shall be square and folded double; a span shall be its length, and a span its width. You shall set in it settings of stones, four rows of stones: a row of ruby, topaz, and beryl shall be the first row; and the second row a turquoise, a sapphire, and an emerald; and the third row a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst; and the fourth row a chrysolite, an onyx, and a jasper. They shall be enclosed in gold in their settings. The stones shall be according to the names of the children of Israel, twelve, according to their names; like the engravings of a signet, everyone according to his name, they shall be for the twelve tribes*.

We immediately note the similarity between the foundations of the City and the formation of the Breastplate. So what was the Breastplate for? Its full name was the Breastplate of Judgment, or Decision, as it also held the Urim and the Thummim, the stones God had Moses place on it so that he could reveal His will to the people. Thus it was through the Breastplate that God revealed His divine will. Perhaps the Breastplate, being a type of the foundation of the Holy City, represented the will, or the divine justice, of God. In that sense the foundation of the Holy City is divine justice, where God's will is supreme; *Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven* (Matthew 6:10).

21-5 Like A Diamond Ring

Rev 21:22-27

> *I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb, are its temple.*
> *23 The city has no need for the sun or moon to shine, for the very glory of God illuminated it, and its lamp is the Lamb.*
> *24 The nations will walk in its light. The kings of the earth bring the glory and honour of the nations into it.*
> *25 Its gates will in no way be shut by day (for there will be no night there),*
> *26 and they shall bring the glory and the honour of the nations into it so that they may enter.*
> *27 There will in no way enter into it anything profane, or one who causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.*

A closer look at Eden shows that it had much in common with the Hebrew Sanctuary. For instance, while the temple faced east, the garden was 'eastward'. While God walked in the garden, He also walked among the people of Israel, the only two times this word is used (Genesis 3:8, Deuteronomy 23:14). Both contain the same precious stones, gold, bdellium and onyx. While the temple contained the outer court, the Holy Place, and the Most Holy Place, the original Creation comprised the earth, the garden, and 'the midst of the garden' wherein was the tree of life. These are just a few of examples of such parallels.

John sees no temple there because the Lord and the Lamb are the temple and are its Light. In the Creation passage the Hebrew term for light, referring to the greater and lesser light (Genesis 1:16), is the same term used to describe the seven-branched candlestick of the Sanctuary. Thus could Christ say, *I am the Light of the world* (John 8:12).

The brilliance that emanates from God's presence within the Holy City far outshines the sun, and radiates outwards so that it is visible from the most distant reaches of the universe. Just as we can look into the heavens today and see the brilliance of Sirius, nine light years away, and the glow of Betelgeuse in Orion 522 light years away, so it will be

that our humble planet will shine so brightly that the inhabitants of other sinless worlds will be able to mark its location with ease. What a magnificent sight will this brilliant sapphire-blue planet make seen from worlds afar. As it is approached, the light from the Holy City will be seen to emanate from one part of it, so that the sapphire orb will provide the setting for the jewel of the City - like a diamond ring.

Perhaps this perspective helps us better understand what John saw when he watched the Holy City descending from heaven. Most artists trying to visualise such splendour rely on the image of immense golden skyscrapers to provide the height dimension. However, it may not be the presence of heavenly buildings that provide the vertical measurement, but the extent of the brilliance emanating from the throne of God that forms a canopy of light extending far into the heavens, culminating in a glorious multihued bow at its zenith.

With this understanding, perhaps we can now be brazen enough to try and describe the New Jerusalem given the information we have gleaned in the past two chapters. We learned from the Jubilee Principle, explained in *20-3 Satan's Parole,* that the earth would be returned to its rightful owner, Jesus Christ, on the great day of Jubilee. At that time the Garden of Eden, taken from the earth prior to the Flood, will again be returned to the earth, and will be the 'camp of the saints' that Satan will endeavour to capture. We saw that this 'camp' is either all of, or a part of, the Holy City.

Therefore we may justly picture the Holy City not in terms of buildings, but in terms of a garden. The garden is vast, like an immense estate resplendent with lush parkland, sparkling lakes, tinkling streams, stately rivers, and majestic peaks. Wildlife is abundant, far more dramatic in colour and size than we see today; and all in harmony, with species able to develop their potential without threat from competing life forms, - a perfect symbiosis. The redeemed will be given the joyful duty of tending it and caring for the wildlife that repose within it.

The garden will be surrounded by a wall, not of bricks and mortar, but of precious stones that dazzle with brilliance. The wall, which stretches as far as the eye can see, will be placed upon a foundation of different gems, each section a different colour. On each side of the wall will be three gates, spaced at regular intervals, and left open continually. They will be made of translucent pearl, so that the light from within shines through them causing them to glow with the glory of God.

The earth outside the walls will also be beautiful, free of thorns and harmful creatures, and free from any threat. Inhabitants of the earth will joyfully live there serving God as kings and priests, ambassadors of Christ to the unfallen worlds. From Sabbath to Sabbath they will come to the City, the glorious Garden, into the presence of God, in order to worship Him. Every month, those from more distant reaches will come and kneel before their Creator (Isaiah 66:22-23).

But the greatest of all will be that Jesus will be there, a Friend to all, the Creator and Sustainer of all life. The Elder Brother of the redeemed, the King of the Universe, the One before whom every knee shall bow, and every voice declare that God is Love.

I dreamed of a city called Glory,
A city so bright and so fair;
As I entered that gate, I cried holy
As the angels of God I met there.
They bore me from mansion to mansion,
And all the sights I did see.
But I said, I want to see Jesus,
He's the One who died for me.

I fell on my knees and cried, "Holy",
I clapped my hands and sang "Glory"
Glory to the Son of God.[97]

[97] Nettie Dudley Washington, *I Bowed On My Knees and Cried Holy,* Hill & Range Songs, 1923.

Chapter 22

22-1 The River of Life

Rev 22:1-6

> *He showed me a river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb,*
> *2 in the middle of its street. On this side of the river and on that was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruits, yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.*
> *3 There will be no curse any more. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will serve him.*
> *4 They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.*
> *5 There will be no night, and they need no lamp light or sun light; for the Lord God will illuminate them. They will reign forever and ever.*
> *6 He said to me, "These words are faithful and true. The Lord God of the spirits of the prophets sent his angel to show to his bondservants the things which must happen soon."*

This section could perhaps have been included as a part of Chapter 21 for it continues the description of Paradise. The throne of God is evidently the focal point of the Garden City, but while there is no temple as such, it would be reasonable to suppose that the throne is in some form of structure. Whether it be a stunning edifice or an emerald-coloured rainbow such as John saw in Revelation 4:3 we can only imagine.

That the throne in Paradise differs from the throne of Chapter 4 is suggested by the fact that Christ was still our ministering High Priest in the heavenly Temple at that time. That throne was surrounded by the twenty-four elders, the four living creatures, and the sea of glass, which may have been the antitypical Laver. Whether or not the throne of Chapter 22 is also surrounded by the elders and creatures, we are not told. The Christ of Chapter 22 is no longer a Priest, but a King, and no longer intercedes, but rules. Perhaps this is why John does not describe a sea of glass before this throne, but instead describes the throne of God as being the source of the River of Life. Presumably, the river flows from the ground beneath the throne.

It appears that the river flows down the centre of a 'street'. Perhaps 'avenue' or 'boulevard' would be more descriptive, for it is more likely to be in a garden setting than in an urban one. We are told in Revelation 21:21 that this avenue is of the purest gold, and in this passage we see that it appears to have the River of Life coursing down its centre, thus dividing it lengthways into two. The Tree of Life spans the river, but how wide the river or large the tree, we know not. How long or how wide the avenue we do not know, but given the size of the Garden City, its length could be far greater than we can imagine, and is no doubt far wider and more ornate than our popular conception of a street.

We are given little further description of the New Earth, for John's attention is drawn to the presence of the Lamb. As beautiful as heaven will be, the main attraction for the redeemed will never be anything other than Jesus Himself. He is their Light; He is their Provider and Sustainer; He is the One who has given it all; He is the reason they are there.

22-2 Gabriel

Rev 22: 7-9

> *"Behold, I come quickly. Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."*
> *8 Now I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. When I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who had shown me these things.*
> *9 He said to me, "See you don't do it! I am a fellow bondservant with you and with your brothers, the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God."*

This is the second time John has tried to worship the angel who has been his instructor (See Revelation 19:10). Why? As a Jew, John would never have considered worshipping that which was not God. Perhaps it was the majestic bearing of the being, and the glory surrounding him, in contrast to the rugged island on which John was held prisoner, that led to some confusion in his mind as to what was divine and what was not.

A clue that will help us understand John's problem is found at the very beginning of the book. In Revelation 1:1-2 we see that God gave the book to Christ, who in turn gave it to His angel, who gave it to John, who has shared it with us. Who is Christ's angel? Undoubtedly this is Gabriel. In Daniel 8:16 it was Gabriel that was sent to explain to Daniel the meaning of the visions, and it was Gabriel's presence that caused Daniel to fall on his face in fear. In Daniel 9:21 it is Gabriel who was given the responsibility of sharing with Daniel the blessed prophecy of the seventy weeks. It was Gabriel who was sent to Zechariah and to Mary (Luke 1:19, 26). Gabriel is the one who is commissioned where matters concerning the Messiah are involved.

Daniel Chapter 10 is quite revealing as to the nature of Gabriel. There he is described as a being so glorious that Daniel collapses before him. He is commissioned to fight battles on Michael's behalf, and twice in the chapter (verses 13, 21) Gabriel reveals that Michael, the heavenly name for Christ, is his immediate Superior.

These points help us understand why John has twice made the mistake of trying to worship this glorious being. Gabriel's glory is such that only God is more so. His is the position possibly once held by Lucifer, who became exalted by his glory, and who allowed his pride to give birth to sin. Unlike Lucifer who said, *If you worship me, all shall be yours.* (Luke 4:7), Gabriel said, "*Don't worship me…worship God*".

22-3 The Unsealed Book

Rev 22:10-11

> *He said to me, "Don't seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand.*
> *11 He who acts unjustly, let him act unjustly still. He who is filthy, let him be filthy still. He who is righteous, let him do righteousness still. He who is holy, let him be holy still."*

John is told not to seal the words of the book of Revelation. This is in strong contrast to Daniel who was told, *But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased* (Daniel 12:4), Daniel was told that his writings would be understood at the time of the end. Now we have reached that time, and John is told not to seal his book.

Revelation is a book that Christ wishes all to know and understand. Strange then that so few have made the effort to understand it.

Strange also that what Christ wants us all to understand, He presents in such veiled language. We remember that Jesus, when on earth, also spoke in parables. He did so, He said, because those who did not desire to see Him would not understand Him (Matthew 13:13). Not *so that* they would not understand Him, but *because* they would not understand Him. Christ seems to be seeking those who are interested enough in what He has to say to make the effort to search out His meaning.

The lesson we learn here is again the importance of reading the Scriptures. We must never accept what others tell us about the Scriptures without, like the Bereans (Acts 17:11), studying for ourselves the things we are told in order to confirm their accuracy. It is a sad fact that many who claim to follow Christ today have little interest in His Word. These poor souls leave themselves open to any doctrine that takes their fancy, without a thought that, like Bunyan's *Mr. Vain-confidence,* they will fall into the pit on By-path Meadow.[98]

Yet none is forced. Christ's way is made by choice, for should He coerce us into following Him He would be a dictator. Nevertheless there is an ominous finality about the words of verse 11 that remind us that while God loves us, He needs our obedience, and that one day some of us may face the consequences of that choice. For it is not without significance that the pronouncement of verse 11 is linked to the reminder to study God's Word.

22-4 Inside, Outside

Rev 22:12-16

> *"Behold, I come quickly. My reward is with me, to repay to each man according to his work.*
> *13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.*

[98] John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress.* Electronic Text Centre, University of Virginia, 2000, p.125

14 Blessed are those who do his commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter in by the gates into the city.
15 Outside are the dogs, the sorcerers, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.
16 I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify these things to you for the assemblies. I am the root and the offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star."

When we studied Chapter 1 we learnt about chiastic structures, the mirror imaging of thoughts and ideas. We see an example of this when we compare Chapter 22 with Chapter 1. The reference to Christ as the Alpha and Omega was introduced there at the beginning of the book, and again here at the end.

Likewise, Revelation 1:3 introduced our first beatitude, a blessing upon those who adhere to the words of this prophecy. Now in 22:14 we have the last of the seven beatitudes, but we immediately notice a major difference between the WEB and NIV renditions of this verse. Which translators were correct? Is it those who keep the commandments, or those who wash their robes, that are blessed?

A comparison of the Greek texts immediately reveals the similarity between the two expressions in that language. The WEB (and KJV) uses *hoi poiontes tas entolas autou*, while the NIV uses *hoi plunontes tas stolas autou.* Evidently some scribe of long ago made a slip somewhere, and by changing only one or two letters, entirely altered the phrase. A comparison of the Greek texts available to us today reveals that the majority of texts, and the oldest ones, contain the NIV translation.

In fact either translation makes complete sense and is in harmony with the Scriptures. Revelation 14:12 informs us that the saints are those that keep the commandments; Revelation 7:14 reminds us that the saints are those who have washed their robes. Rather than contradicting one another, these verses demonstrate the twofold attributes of sainthood, obedience and faith. As we have seen before, neither of these are the means of our salvation, but are its fruit. They are together the two essential ingredients for the victorious Christian life. Obedience without faith is vanity, and faith without obedience is barren.

In verse 15 we are given a description of those who are outside the Holy City. They are contrasted with the obedient saints in terms of the commandments they do not keep: idolatry, adultery, and dishonesty in particular. Not only do they practice these things, but they love them. To love sin is not necessarily to commit it, but it is to condone it. The redeemed will not only resist sin, but they will hate it, for they understand what it has cost heaven.

22-5 The Invitation

Rev 22:17-21

> *The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" He who hears, let him say, "Come!" He who is thirsty, let him come. He who desires, let him take the water of life freely.*
> *18 I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book, if anyone adds to them, may God add to him the plagues which are written in this book.*
> *19 If anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, may God take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city, which are written in this book.*
> *20 He who testifies these things says, "Yes, I come quickly." Amen! Yes, come, Lord Jesus.*

The Book of Revelation finishes with an invitation, a warning and a promise. Jesus' invitation is the same one he gave during His earthly ministry,*"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink! He who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, from within him will flow rivers of living water."* (John 7:37, Matthew 5:6). The invitation is not only from Christ, but also from His bride, the church. Christ has bidden His people to be the bearers of the invitation. It is a summons to all, not only to Christians, but also to Jews, Moslems, Hindus, and to every religion under the sun. Not only to the rich and famous, but also to the humble dwellers of the back alleys. Not only to the good citizen, but also to the dregs of society. Not only those who are admired for their looks or their success, but also to those who are not even noticed. All who yearn for a purer and better way; all who are sick and tired of their depraved, corrupt and addicted lives; all to whom life has offered nothing worthwhile, but who hold a faint hope of something, somewhere that is better; all who have come to despise the sinful

existence that is theirs; these are invited to drink the water that Christ offers them – bountiful, pure and perfect.

So earnest is Christ in His invitation that He cannot bear the thought that any man might tamper with it. Those who bear the invitation on Christ's behalf must deliver it exactly as written or they will no longer be considered His messengers. Time is short; the Groom is about to come for His bride, and she anxiously awaits Him. *Even so, come, Lord Jesus.*

> *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with all the saints. Amen.*